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JOSHUA.

A STORY OF BIBLICAL LIFE.

BY

GEORG EBERS,

AUTHOR OF "AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS," "UARDA," ETC.

FROM THE GERMAN BY

CLARA AND MARGARET BELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES:—VOL. I.

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY

OF

GUSTAV BAUR.

PREFACE.

WHEN in the course of last winter I made up my mind to finish this book and occupied myself in giving it the form in which it is now offered to the public, I constantly bore in mind the dear friend to whom I always intended to dedicate it. Now, it is my sad privilege to inscribe it only to the Manes of Gustav Baur, for, but a few months since, death snatched him away.

Every one who had ever come into close communion with him felt his death as an unspeakably bitter loss, not only because his bright and cheerful nature and happy wit brought light to the soul of his friends; not only, because he was ready from the brimming stores of his abundant knowledge to give freely to all who came into intellectual contact with him; but, above all, because the warm heart, which

beamed through his eyes, made him feel the joy and sorrow of others as his own, and throw himself into their thoughts and feelings. Till my latest day I can never forget how, in these latter years, infirm in body and overwhelmed with the work of a professor and a member of the Consistory, he would still constantly find his way to see me, his yet more crippled friend. The hours it was then my good fortune to spend in eager conversation with him, were such as we "write down good", to quote old Horace, whom he knew and loved so well. I have done so; as I gratefully recall them my friend's voice sounds in my ear asking: "And what about the tale of the Exodus?" When I first told him that it was in the midst of the desert, while following up the traces of the fugitive Hebrews, that the idea had occurred to me of treating their wanderings in a work of imagination, he expressed his approval with the captivating eagerness which was characteristic of the man. When, then, I developed the idea which I had first sketched riding on a camel, he never was weary of encouraging me, although he quite understood my hesitation and fully recognised the difficulties which surrounded the execution of my task.

This book then, in a certain sense, is his, and the fact that it can no longer be offered to him

living, can never be the subject of his subtle judgment, is one of the sorrows which make it hard to accept with a good grace the advancing years, which otherwise have brought so much that is sweet.

He, who was one of the most famous, clear-sighted and learned students of the Bible and its exegesis of our day, was familiar with all the critical labours which have been published within the last few lustra in the field of Old Testament criticism. He took up a determined attitude against the views of a younger school who endeavour to expunge the Exodus of the Israelites from the page of history, and regard it as a later outcome of the myth-forming spirit of the people; a theory which he, like myself, regarded as untenable. One of his sentences on this question dwells in my memory, to this effect: "If the events recorded in the Second Book of Moses really never occurred—a hypothesis I entirely reject—then no historical event entailing equally important results need have happened anywhere or at any time. The story of the Exodus has, for thousands of years, survived in the minds of numberless human beings as a real event, and has influenced them as such. Hence it is no less certainly a part of history, than the French Revolution and its results."

But in spite of such encouragement, for many years I lacked courage to bring my tale of the Exodus to a conclusion, till, last winter, an unexpected request from abroad prompted me take it up again. I then carried it through without interruption and with fresh spirit, and I may say with rejuvenated delight in the perilous and yet fascinating theme.

The locality of the narrative, the scenery in which it moves, I have described as exactly as possible from that which I saw in Goshen and the Sinaitic peninsula, and it will answer to the preconceptions of many a reader of "Joshua." With regard to those parts of the story which I have introduced on the ground of ancient Egyptian lore it will be different. They will surprise the novice, for few perhaps have ever reflected as to how the events related in the Bible from the Jewish point of view, may have affected the Egyptians; or what the political condition of the land of the Pharaohs may have been when they bid the Israelites depart. I have endeavoured to depict these things as truly as possible from the monumental records. For the portraits of the Hebrews mentioned in Scripture the Bible is the best authority, and the character of the Pharaoh of the Exodus is also painted from the Bible narrative; it agrees very remarkably with the

remaining pictures of the weak King Menephtah. From the history of a somewhat later period I have borrowed and introduced the conspiracy of Siptah; the accession of Seti II. and the person of Aarsu the Syrian, who, according to the Harris Papyrus, No. I. (London) seized the reins of government after Siptah had been proclaimed king.

Monsieur Naville's excavations have left no doubts as to the position of Pithom, or Succoth. They brought to light the fortified Storehouse of Pithom mentioned in the Bible; and as the narrative tells us that the Israelites rested there, and then set forth again, it must be assumed that they conquered the garrison of the building and took possession of the contents of the vast granaries which may be seen at this day.

In my work, published so long ago as 1868,* I already pointed out that the Etham of the Bible was identical with the Egyptian Khetam, that is to say, the line of fortresses which protected the isthmus of Suez from the attacks of the peoples of the East, and my opinion has long since been generally accepted. It fully explains the return of the wanderers from Etham.

* *Ägypten und die Bücher Mose's.* Leipzig, W. Engelmann.

The mount of the Lawgiving is, to me, the majestic peak of Serbal, not the Sinai of the monks; my reasons are fully explained in my work on Sinai.* I have also endeavoured in the same book to show that the resting place called in the Bible Dophkah, is identical with the abandoned mines now called Wadi Maghâra.

The writer has endeavoured by means of the actors in his tale, their adventures and reflexions—in part the invention of his own fancy—to make the mighty destinies of the people he has attempted to describe more humanly real to the sympathetic reader. If he has succeeded in this, without seeming to dwarf the splendid narrative of the Bible, he has attained his end; if he has failed, he must rest content with the pleasure and personal exaltation he has enjoyed while composing the work.

TUTZING am Starnberger See. September 1889.

GEORG EBERS.

* Durch Gosen nach Sinai. Leipzig, W. Engelmann.
2. Auflage 1882.

J O S H U A.

CHAPTER I.

"Go down, grandfather. I will keep watch."

But the old man to whom the words were spoken shook his shaven head.

"But up here you will get no rest."

"And the stars? Or even below; rest, in such times as these? Throw my cloak over me. Rest, in such a fearful night!"

"You are so cold; and your hand and the instrument shake."

"Then steady my arm."

The lad willingly obeyed the request; but after a short space he exclaimed: "It is all in vain. Star after star is swallowed up in black clouds. Ah, and the bitter cry of the city comes up. Nay, it comes from our own house. I am sick at heart, grand-

father; only feel how hot my head is. Come down, perchance they need help."

"That is in the hands of the gods, and my place is here. But there, there! Eternal gods! Look to the north across the lake! No, more to the westward. They come from the city of the dead!"

"Oh, grandfather, father, there!" cried the youth, a priestly neophyte, who was lending his aid to an elder, his grandfather, the chief astrologer of Amon-Ra.

They were standing on the watch tower of the temple of the god of Tanis, the capital of the Pharaohs, in the north of the land of Goshen. As he spoke he drew away his shoulder on which the old man was leaning. "There, there! Is the sea swallowing up the land? Have the clouds fallen on the earth to surge to and fro? Oh, grandfather, may the immortals have mercy! the nether world is yawning! The great serpent Apep is come forth from the city of the dead! It comes rolling past the temple. I see it, I hear it! The great Hebrew's threat is being fulfilled! Our race will be cut off from the earth. The serpent! Its head is set toward the south-east. It will surely swallow up the young sun when it rises in the morning!"

The old man's eye followed the direction of the

youth's finger, and he, too, could discern that a vast, black mass, whose outline was lost in the darkness, came rolling through the gloom, and he, too, heard with a shudder the creature's low roar.

Both stood with eye and ear alert, staring into the night; but the star-gazer's eye was fixed not upward, but down, across the city to the distant sea and level plain. Overhead all was silent, and yet not all at rest, for the wind swept the dark clouds into shapeless masses in one place, while in another it rent the gray shroud and scattered them far and wide.

The moon was not visible to mortal ken, but the clouds played hide and seek with the bright Southern stars, now covering them, and now giving their rays free passage. And as in the firmament, so on earth there was a constant change from pallid light to blackest darkness. Now the glitter of the heavenly bodies flashed brightly down on the sea and estuary, on the polished granite sides of the obelisks in the temple precincts, and the gilt copper roof of the King's airy palace; and again, lake and river, the sails in the harbour, the sanctuaries and streets of the city, and the palm-strewn plain surrounding it, were all lost in gloom.

Objects which the eye tried to rest on vanished

in an instant, and it was the same with the sounds that met the ear. For a while the silence would be as deep as though all life, far and near, were hushed or dead, and then a piercing shriek of woe rent the stillness of the night. And then, broken by longer or shorter pauses, that roar was heard which the youthful priest had taken for the voice of the serpent of the nether world; and to that the grandfather and grandson listened with growing excitement.

The dusky shape, whose ceaseless movements could be clearly made out whenever the stars shot their beams between the striving clouds, had its beginning out by the city of the dead and the strangers' quarter. A sudden panic had fallen on the old man as on the young one; but he was quicker to recover himself, and his keen and practised eye soon discerned that it was not a single gigantic form which was rising from the necropolis to cross the plain, but a multitude of moving creatures who seemed to be surging or swaying to and fro on the meadow-land. Nor did the hollow hum and wailing come up from one particular spot, but was audible now nearer and now more remote. Anon he fancied that it was rising from the bosom of the earth, and then again that it fell from some airy height.

Fresh terror came upon the old astrologer. He seized his grandson's wrist in his right hand, and pointing with his left to the city of the dead, he cried in a trembling voice: "The dead are too many in number. The nether world overflows, as the river does when its bed is too narrow for the waters of the south. How they swarm and sway and surge on! How they part, hither and thither. These are the ghosts of the thousands whom black death hath snatched away, blasted by the Hebrew's curse, and sent unburied, unprotected from corruption, to descend the rungs of the ladder which leads to the world without end."

"Yea, it is they!" cried the other, in full belief. He snatched his hand from the old man's grasp and struck his fevered and burning brow, exclaiming, though hardly able to speak for terror: "They—the damned! The wind has blown them to the sea, and its waters spew them out and cast them on the land again, and the blessed earth rejects them and drives them into the air. The pure ether of Shoo flings them back to the ground, and now—look, listen! They are groaning as they seek the way to the desert."

"To the fire!" cried the elder. "Flame, purify them; water, cleanse them!"

The youth joined in the old priest's form of exorcism, and while they chanted it in unison the trap door was lifted which led to this observatory on the top of the highest gate of the temple, and a priest of humble grade cried to the old man:

"Cease thy labours. Who cares now for the stars of heaven when all that has life is being darkened on earth?"

The old priest listened speechless till the messenger went on to say that it was the astrologer's wife who had sent for him, and then he gasped out:

"Hora? Is my son then likewise stricken?"

The priest bent his head, and both his hearers wept bitterly, for the old man was bereft of his first-born son, and the lad of a tender father.

But when the boy, trembling with fever, fell sick and sorrowing on his grandfather's breast, the elder hastily freed himself from his embrace and went to the trap door; for although the priest had announced himself as the messenger of death, it needs more than the bare word of another to persuade a father to give up all hope of life for his child. The old man went quickly down the stone stairs, through the lofty halls and wide courts of the temple, and the lad followed him, although his

shaking knees could scarcely carry his fevered frame. The blow which had fallen within his own little circle had made the old man forget the fearful portent which threatened the whole world perhaps with ruin; but the boy could not get rid of the vision, so when he had passed the first court and was in sight of the outermost pylons, to his terrified and anxious soul it seemed as though the shadows of the obelisks were spinning round, while the two stone statues of King Rameses on the corner piers of the great gate beat time with the crook in his hand.

At this the lad dropped fever-stricken on the ground. A convulsion distorted his features and tossed his slender frame to and fro in frantic spasms; and the old man, falling on his knees, while he guarded the curly head from striking the hard stone flags, moaned in a low voice: "Now it has fallen on him!"

Suddenly he collected himself and shouted aloud for help, but in vain, and again in vain. At last his voice fell; he sought consolation in prayer. Then he heard a sound of voices from the avenue of sphinxes leading to the great gate, and new hope revived in his heart.

Who could it be who was arriving at so late an hour?

Mingled with cries of grief, the chanting of priests fell on his ear, the tinkle and clatter of the metal sistrum shaken by holy women in honor of the god, and the measured footfall of men, praying as they marched on.

A solemn procession was approaching. The astrologer raised his eyes, and after glancing at the double line of granite columns, colossal statues and obelisks in the great court, looked up, in obedience to the habits of a lifetime, at the starry heavens above, and in the midst of his woe a bitter smile parted his sunken lips, for the gods this night lacked the honors that were their due.

For on this night—the first after the new moon in the month of Pharmutee—the sanctuary in former years was wont to be gay with garlands of flowers. At the dawn of day after this moonless night the high festival of the spring equinox should begin, and with it the harvest thanksgiving.

At this time a grand procession marched through the city to the river and harbour, as prescribed by the Book of the Divine Birth of the Sun, in honor of the great goddess Neith, of Rennout, who bestows the gifts of the field, and of Horus, at whose bidding the desert blooms; but to-day the silence of death reigned in the sanctuary, whose courtyard should

have been crowded at this hour with men, women and children, bringing offerings to lay on the very spot where his grandson lay under the hand of death.

A broad beam of light suddenly fell into the vast court, which till now had been but dimly lighted by a few lamps. Could they be so mad as to think that the glad festival might be held in spite of the nameless horrors of the past night?

Only the evening before, the priests in council had determined that during this pitiless pestilence the temples were to be left unadorned and processions to be prohibited. By noon yesterday many had failed to attend, because the plague had fallen on their households, and the terror had now come into this very sanctuary, while he, who could read the stars, had been watching them in their courses. Why else should it have been deserted by the watchmen and other astrologers, who had been with him at sunset, and whose duty it was to keep vigil here all night?

He turned once more to the suffering boy with tender anxiety, but instantly started to his feet, for the gates were opened wide and the light of torches and lanterns poured into the temple court. A glance at the sky showed him that it was not long past midnight, and yet his fears were surely well grounded

—these must be the priests crowding into the temple to prepare for the harvest festival.

Not so.

For when had they come to the sanctuary for this purpose chanting and in procession? Nor were these all servants of the divinity. The populace had joined them. In that solemn litany he could hear the shrill wailing of women mingled with wild cries of despair such as he had never before, in the course of a long life, heard within these consecrated walls.

Or did his senses deceive him? Was it the groaning horde of unresting souls which he had seen from the observatory who were crowding into the sanctuary of the god?

Fresh horror fell upon him; he threw up his arms in prohibition and for a few moments repeated the formula against the malice of evil spirits; but he presently dropped his hands, for he marked among the throng some friends who yesterday, at any rate, had been in the land of the living. Foremost, the tall figure of the second prophet of the god, then the women devoted to the service of Amon-Ra, the singers and the holy fathers, and when at last, behind the astrologers and pastophoroi, he saw his son-in-law whose home had till yester-

day been spared by the plague, he took heart and spoke to him. But his voice was drowned by the song and cries of the coming multitude.

The courtyard was now fully lighted; but every one was so absorbed in his own sorrow that no one heeded the old astrologer. He snatched the cloak off his own shivering body to make a better pillow for the boy's tossing head, and while he did so with fatherly care, he could hear among the chanting and wailing of the approaching crowd, first, frantic curses on the Hebrews, through whom these woes had fallen on Pharaoh and his people, and then, again and again, the name of the heir to the crown, Prince Rameses, and the tone in which it was spoken, and the formulas of mourning which were added, announced to all who had ears to hear that the eyes of the first-born of the King on his throne were also sealed in death.

As he gazed with growing anguish in his grandson's pale face the lamentations for the prince rang out afresh and louder than ever, and a faint sense of satisfaction crept into his soul at the impartiality of death, who spared not the sovereign on his throne any more than the beggar by the wayside.

He knew now what had brought this noisy throng to the sanctuary.

He went forward with such haste as his old limbs would allow to meet the column of mourners, but before he could join them he saw the gatekeeper and his wife come out of the gatehouse, bearing between them on a mat the corpse of a boy. The husband held one end, his frail, tiny wife held the other, and the stalwart man had to stoop low to keep their stiff burden in a horizontal position that it might not slip down toward the woman. Three children closed the melancholy party, and a little girl holding a lantern led the way.

No one, perhaps, would have observed them but that the gatekeeper's wife shrieked forth her griefs so loudly and shrilly that it was impossible not to hear her cries. Then at length the second prophet of Amon and his companions turned about; the procession came to a standstill, and, as some of the priests went nearer to the body, the father cried in a loud voice: "Away, away from the plague-stricken! Our first-born is dead!"

The mother, meanwhile, had snatched the lantern from her little daughter, and, holding it so as to throw a light on the rigid face of the dead boy, she shrieked out:

"The god hath suffered it to come to pass. Yea, even under our own roof. But it is not his will, but

the curse of the stranger in the land that has come over us and our lives. Behold, this was our first-born; and two temple servants have likewise been taken. One is dead already; he is lying in our little room yonder; and there—see, there lies young Ramus, the grandson of Rameri, the star-reader. We heard the old man calling, and saw what was happening, but who can hold another man's house up when his own is falling about his ears? Beware while it is yet time, for the gods have opened even the temple gates to the abomination, and if the whole world should perish I should not be surprised and never complain—certainly not. My lords and priests, I am but a poor and humble woman, but am I not in the right when I ask: Are our gods asleep, that a magic spell has bound them? Or what are they doing, and where are they, that they leave us and our children in the power of the vile Hebrew race?"

"Down with them! Down with the strangers! They are magicians; into the sea with Mesu,* the sorcerer!"

As an echo follows a cry, so did these imprecations follow the woman's curse, and Hornecht, the

* Mesu is the Egyptian form of Moses.

old astrologer's son-in-law, captain of the archers, whose blood boiled over at the sight of his dying, fair young nephew, brandished his short sword, and cried in a frenzy of rage: "Follow me, every man who has a heart! At them! Life for Life! Ten Hebrews for each Egyptian whom their sorcerer has killed!"

As a flock will rush into the fire if only the ram leads the way, the crowd flocked to follow the noble warrior. The women pushed in front of the men, thronging the doorway, and as the servants of the sanctuary hesitated till they should know the opinion of the prophet of Amon, their leader threw up his majestic figure, and said deliberately:

"All who wear priests' robes remain to pray with me. The people are the instrument of heaven, and it is theirs to repay. We stay here to pray for success to their vengeance."

CHAPTER II.

BAIE, the second prophet of Amon, who acted as deputy for the now infirm old head-prophet and high-priest Ruie, withdrew into the holy of holies, and while the multitude of the inferior ministers of the god proceeded to their various duties, the infuriated crowd hurried through the streets of the town to the strangers' quarter.

As a swollen torrent raging through a valley carries down with it everything in its way, so the throng, as they rushed to their revenge, compelled every one on their way to join them. Every Egyptian from whom death had snatched his nearest and dearest was ready to join the swelling tide, and it grew till it numbered hundreds of thousands. Men, women and children, slaves and free, borne on the wings of their desire to wreak ruin and death on the detested Hebrews, flew to the distant quarter where they dwelt.

How this artisan had laid hold of a chopper or that housewife had clutched an axe they themselves

scarcely knew. They rushed on to kill and destroy, and they had not sought the weapons they needed; they had found them ready to their hand.

The first they hoped to fall upon in their mad fury was Nun, a venerable Hebrew, respected and beloved by many—a man rich in herds, who had done much kindness to the Egyptians; but where hatred and revenge make themselves heard gratitude stands shy and speechless in the background.

His large estates lay, like the houses and huts of the men of his race, to the west of Tanis, the strangers' quarter, and were the nearest of them all to the streets inhabited by the Egyptians themselves.

At this morning hour Nun's flocks and herds were wont to be taken, first to water, and then to the pasture; so the large yard in front of his house would be full of cattle, farm men and women, carts and field implements. The owner himself commonly ordered the going of his beasts, and he and his were to be the first victims of the popular rage.

The swiftest runners had already reached his spacious farm, and among them Hornecht, the captain of the archers. There lay the house and buildings in the first bright beams of the morning sun, and a brawny smith kicked violently at the closed

door; but there was no bolt, and it flew open so readily that he had to clutch at the door post to save himself from falling. Others pushed by him into the courtyard, among them the archer chief.

But what was the meaning of this?

Had some new charm been wrought to show the power of Mesu, who had brought such terrible plagues already on the land, and to display the might of his god?

The yard was empty, absolutely empty; only in their stalls lay a few cattle and sheep, slain because they had suffered some injury, while a lame lamb hobbled away at the sight of the intruders. Even the carts and barrows had vanished. The groaning and bleating crowd, which the star-gazer had taken to be the spirits of the damned, was the host of the Hebrews, who had fled by night with all their herds, under the guidance of Moses.

The leader dropped his sword, and it might have been thought that the scene before him was to him an agreeable surprise, but his companion, a scribe from the King's treasury, looked round the deserted courtyard with the disappointed air of a man who has been cheated.

The tide of passions and schemes which had

risen high during the night ebbed under the broad light of day! Even the soldier's easily-stirred ire had subsided to comparative calm. The mob might have done their worst to the other Hebrews, but not to Nun, whose son Hosea had been his comrade in battle, one of the most esteemed captains in the field, and a private friend of his own. If Hornecht had foreseen that his father's farmstead would be the first spot to be attacked, he would never have led the mob to their revenge, and once more in his life he bitterly rued that he had been carried away by sudden wrath to forget the calm demeanor which beseeemed his years. And now, while some of the crowd proceeded to rifle and pull down Nun's deserted dwellings, men and women came running in to say that no living soul was to be found in any of the other houses near. Some had to tell of yelling cats squatting on vacant hearths, of beasts past service found slaughtered, and broken household gear; till at last the angry crowd dragged forward a Hebrew with his family, and a gray-haired, half-witted woman whom they had hunted out among some straw. The old woman laughed foolishly and said that her people had called her till they were hoarse, but Mehela knew better; and as for walking, walking forever, as her people meant to do, that she

could not; her feet were too tender, and she had not even a pair of sandals.

The man, a hideous Jew, whom few even of his own race would have regarded with pity, declared, first with humility bordering on servility, and then with the insolent daring that was natural to him, that he had nothing to do with the god of lies in whose name the impostor Moses had tempted away his people, but that he and his wife and child had always been friends with the Egyptians. As a matter of fact he was known to many, being an usurer, and when the rest of his tribe had taken up their staves he had hidden himself, hoping to pursue his dishonest dealings and come to no loss.

But some of his debtors were among the furious mob; and even without them he had not a chance for his life, for he was the first object on which the excited multitude could prove that they were in earnest in their revenge. They rushed on him with yells of rage, and in a few minutes the bodies of the hapless wretch and his family lay dead on the ground. No one knew who had done the bloody deed; too many had fallen on the victims at once.

Others who had remained behind were dragged forth from houses or hovels, and they were not a few, though many had time to escape into the coun-

try. These all fell victims to the wrath of the populace; and while their blood was flowing, axes were heaved, and doors and walls were battered down with beams and posts to destroy the dwellings of the detested race from the face of the earth.

The glowing embers which some furious women had brought with them were extinguished and trodden out, for the more prudent warned them of the danger which must threaten their own adjoining dwellings and the whole city of Tanis if the strangers' quarter were set in flames.

Thus the homes of the Hebrews were spared from fire, but as the sun rose higher, the site of the dwellings they had deserted was wrapped in an impenetrable cloud of white dust from the ruins, and on the spot where but yesterday thousands of human beings had had a happy home, and where vast herds had slaked their thirst by fresh waters, nothing was now to be seen but heaps of rubbish and stone, while broken timber and splintered woodwork strewed the scorching soil. Dogs and cats, abandoned by the fugitives, prowled among the ruins, and were presently joined by the women and children who herded in the beggars' hovels on the skirts of the neighbouring necropolis, and who now, with their hands over their mouths, hunted among the choking

dust and piles of lumber for any vessels or broken victuals which the Hebrews might have left behind and the plunderers have overlooked.

In the course of the afternoon Baie was borne in his litter past the scene of devastation. He had not come hither to feast his eyes on the sight of the ruins, but because they lay in the nearest way from the city of the dead to his own home. Nevertheless, a smile of satisfaction curled his grave lips as he noted how thoroughly the populace had done their work. What he himself had hoped to see had not indeed been carried out; the leaders of the fugitives had evaded their revenge, but hatred, though it is never satiated, can be easily gratified. Even the smaller woes of an enemy are joy, and the priest had just quitted the mourning Pharaoh, and though he had not yet succeeded in freeing him completely from the bonds laid upon him by the Hebrew sooth-sayer, yet he had loosened them.

Three words had the proud, ambitious man murmured to himself again and again—a stiffnecked man, not wont to talk to himself—as he sat alone in the sanctuary, meditating on what had happened and on what had to be done; and those three words were: “Bless me also.”

It was Pharaoh who had spoken them, address

ing the petition to another; and that other not old Ruie, the supreme judge and high priest, nor Baie himself, the only men living whose privilege it could be to bless the king; no; but the worst of the accursed, the stranger, the Hebrew Mesu, whom he hated as he hated none other on earth.

“Bless me also!” That pious entreaty, which springs so confidently from the human soul in anguish, had pierced his soul like a dagger-thrust. He felt as though such a prayer, addressed by such lips to such a man, had broken the staff in the hand of the whole priesthood of Egypt, had wrenched the panther skin from its shoulders, and cast a stain on all the nation he loved.

He knew Mesu well for one of the wisest sages ever produced by the schools of Egypt; he knew full well that Pharaoh was spell-bound by this man, who had grown up in his house, and had been the friend of the great Rameses, his father. He had seen the monarch pardon misdeeds in Mesu which any other man, were he the highest in the land, must have expiated with his life; and how dear must this Hebrew have been to Pharaoh—the sun-god on his earthly throne—when he could compel the King, standing by the deathbed of his son, to uplift his hands to him and implore him: “Bless me also!”

All this he had told himself and weighed with due care, and still he, Baie, could not, would not yield to the powerful Hebrew. He had regarded it as his most urgent and sacred duty to bring destruction on him and his whole race. To fulfill that duty he would not have hesitated to lay hands on the throne; indeed, in his eyes, by the utterance of that blasphemous entreaty, "Bless me also," Pharaoh Menephtah had forfeited his right to the sovereignty. Moses was the murderer of Pharaoh's first born, whereas he himself and the venerable high priest of Amon held the weal or woe of the deceased youth's soul in their hands. And this weapon was a keen and a strong one, for he knew how soft and irresolute was the King's heart. If the high priest of Amon—the only man who stood above him—did not contravene him in some unaccountable fit of senile caprice, it would be a small matter to reduce Pharaoh to submission, but the vacillating monarch might repent to-morrow of what he resolved on to-day, if the Hebrew should again succeed in coming between him and his Egyptian counsellors. Only this very day, on hearing the name of Moses spoken in his presence, the degenerate son of Rameses the Great had covered his face and quaked like a frightened gazelle, and to-morrow he might curse

him and pronounce sentence of death against him. He might perhaps indeed be moved to do this, but even then by the day after he would very surely recall him and beseech his blessing once more.

Away with such a monarch! Down with the feeble reed who sat on the throne, down to the very dust! Baie had found a fitting successor among the princes of the blood royal, and when the time should come—when Ruie, the high-priest of Amon, should cross the boundary of the time of life granted to man by the gods and close his eyes in death—then he, Baie himself, would fill his place; a new life should begin for Egypt, and Moses and his tribes were doomed.

As the prophet thus meditated a pair of ravens fluttered around his head, and then, croaking loudly, alighted on the dusty ruins of one of the wrecked tenements. His eye involuntarily followed their flight and perceived that they had settled on the body of a dead Hebrew, half buried in rubbish. And again a smile stole over his cunning, defiant features, a smile which the inferior priests who stood about his litter could by no means interpret.

CHAPTER III.

HORNECHT, captain of the bowmen, had by this time joined company with the prophet. He was indeed in his confidence, for the warrior likewise was one of the men of high rank who had conspired to overthrow the reigning Pharaoh.

As they approached the ruined dwelling of Nun, the priest pointed to the heap of destruction and said: "The man to whom this once belonged is the only Hebrew I fain would spare. He was a man of worth, and his son Hosea—"

"He will be true to us," interrupted the captain. "Few better men serve in the ranks of Pharaoh's armies, and," he added, in a lower voice, "I count on him in the day of deliverance."

"Of that we will speak before fewer witnesses," replied the other. "But I owe him a special debt of gratitude. During the Libyan war—you know of it—I was betrayed into the hand of the enemy, and Hosea, with his handful of men, cut me a way of escape from the wild robbers." Then, dropping his

voice, he went on in his didactic manner, as though he were making excuse for the mischief before them. "Such is life here below! When a whole race of men incurs punishment the evil falls on the guiltless with the guilty. Not even the gods can in such a case divide the individual from the mob; the visitation falls even on the innocent beasts. Look at that flock of pigeons hovering over the ruins; they seek the dovecote in vain. And that cat with her kittens! Go, Bekie, and rescue them; it is our duty to preserve the sacred animals from starving to death."

And this man, who had contemplated the destruction of so many of his fellow-creatures with barbarous joy, took the kindly care of the unreasoning brutes so much to heart that he made the bearers stop, and looked on while his servants caught the cats. But this was not so quickly done as he had hoped, for the mother fled into the nearest cellar opening, and the gap was so narrow as to prevent the men from following her. However, the youngest of them all, a slim Nubian, undertook to fetch her out; but he hardly looked down into the opening when he started back and cried to his lord:

"A human being is lying there, and seems to be yet alive. Yes, he beckons with his hand. It is a

boy or a youth, and certainly not a slave. His hair is long and curly, and on his arm—for a sunbeam falls straight in—I can see a broad gold band.”

“One of the family of Nun, perhaps, who has been forgotten,” said the warrior, and Baie eagerly added: “It is the guidance of the gods! The sacred beasts have led me to the spot where I may do a service to the man to whom I owe so much. Try and make your way in, Bekie, and fetch the youth out.”

The Nubian, meanwhile, had moved away a stone, which, in its fall, had partly closed the entrance, and in a short while he held up to his comrades a motionless young form, which they lifted out into the open air and carried to a well. There they soon brought him back to life with the cool water.

As he recovered consciousness he rubbed his eyes, looked about him in bewilderment as though he knew not where he was, and then his head fell on his breast as if overcome by grief and horror, and it could be seen that at the back of his head the hair was matted with dark patches of dried blood.

By the prophet's care the wound, which was deep, from a stone which had fallen on the lad, was washed at the well; and when it was bound up he

bid him get into his own litter, which was screened from the sun.

The youth had arrived before sunrise, after a long walk by night from Pithom, called by the Hebrews Succoth, to bring a message to his grandfather, Nun, but finding the place deserted he had lain down in one of the empty rooms to rest awhile. Awaking at the uproar of the infuriated Egyptians, and hearing the curses on his race, which rang out on every side, he had fled to the cellar, and the falling roof, although he had been hurt, had proved his salvation, for the clouds of dust, which had hidden everything as it crashed down, had concealed him from the sight of the plunderers.

The priest gazed at him attentively, and though the youth was unwashed and pale, with a blood-stained bandage round his head, he could see that the being he had restored to life was a handsome, well-grown lad, on the verge of manhood. Full of eager sympathy, he mollified the stern gravity of his eye, and questioned him kindly as to whence he came and what had brought him to Tanis, for it was impossible to tell from the youth's features even of what nation he might be. He might easily have passed himself off as an Egyptian, but he quite frankly owned that he was the grandson of Nun. He

was eighteen years of age, his name was Ephraim, like his ancestor, the son of Joseph, and he had come to see his grandfather. And he spoke with an accent of steadfast self-respect and joy in his illustrious descent.

When asked whether he had been the bearer of a message he did not forthwith reply, but after collecting his thoughts he looked fearlessly into the prophet's face and answered frankly:

"Be you who you may, I have been taught to speak the truth. You shall know, then, that I have another kinsman dwelling in Tanis—Hosea, the son of Nun, who is a captain in Pharaoh's army, and I have a message for him."

"And you shall know," replied the priest, "that it was for the sake of that very Hosea that I lingered here and bid my servants rescue you alive from that ruined house. I owe him thanks, and although the greater number of your nation have done deeds worthy of the heaviest punishment, yet for his noble sake you shall dwell among us free and unharmed."

On this the boy looked up at the priest with a flash of eager pride; but before he could speak Baie went on with encouraging friendliness:

"I read in your eyes, my boy, if I am not mis-

taken, that you are come to seek service under your Uncle Hosea in Pharaoh's army. Your stature should make you skilful in handling weapons, and you certainly cannot lack for daring."

A smile of flattered vanity lighted up Ephraim's face, and turning the broad gold bangle on his arm, perhaps unconsciously, he eagerly replied:

"I am brave, my lord, and have proved it often in the hunting-field. But at home there are cattle and sheep in abundance, which I already call my own, and it seems to me a better lot to wander free and rule the shepherds than to do what others bid me."

"So, so," replied the priest. "Well, Hosea perhaps will bring you to another and a better mind. To rule! a noble goal indeed for a youth! The pity is that we who have reached it are but servants, the more heavily-burdened in proportion to the greater number of those who obey us. You understand me, Captain; and you, boy, will understand me later, when you have become such a palm tree as your sapling growth promises. But time presses. Who sent you hither to Hosea?"

The youth again looked down and hesitated; but when the prophet had broken in on his silence by saying, "And that candour which you have been

taught?" he replied, firmly and decidedly: "I came to do pleasure to a woman whom you know not. Let that suffice."

"A woman!" echoed the prophet, and he cast an inquiring glance at Hornecht. "When a valiant warrior and a fair woman seek each other the Hathors* are wont to intervene and use the binding cords, but it ill beseems a minister of the divinity to play spectator to such doings, so I inquire no further. Take this boy under your protection, Captain, and help him to carry his errand to Hosea. The only question is whether he is yet returned."

"No," replied the soldier, "but this very day he and ten thousand men are expected at the armory."

"Then may the Hathors who favor love-messages bring these two to a meeting no later than tomorrow!" cried the priest. But the youth broke in indignantly: "I bear no love message from one to the other!"

And the priest, who was well pleased by his boldness, replied gaily: "I had forgotten that I am speaking to a shepherd-prince." Then he added more gravely: "When you shall have found Hosea give him greeting from me, and say to him that

* The Hathors were the Egyptian love-goddesses. They are often depicted with cords in their hands.

Baie, the second prophet of Amon, whom he saved from the hand of the Libyans, believes that he is paying some part of his debt by extending a protecting hand over you, his nephew. You, bold youth, know not, perhaps, that you have escaped a two-fold danger as by a miracle. The furious Egyptians would no more have spared your life than would the choking dust of falling houses. Bear that in mind, and tell Hosea, moreover, from me, Baie, that I am sure that as soon as he sees with his own eyes the misery wrought on the house of Pharaoh to whom he has sworn allegiance, and with it, on this city and on the whole land, by the magic arts of one of your race, he will cut himself off in horror from those cowards. For they have basely fled, after slaying the best and dearest of those among whom they have dwelt in peace, whose protection they have enjoyed, and who for long years have given them work and fed them abundantly. If I know him at all, as an honest man he will turn his back on those who have sinned thus. And you may tell him likewise that the Hebrew officers and fighting men under the captainship of Aarsu, the Syrian, have already done so of their own free will. This day—and Hosea will have heard the tidings from others—they offered sacrifice, not only to their own

gods, Baal and Set—whom you, too, many of you, were wont to serve before the vile magician Mesu led you astray—but also to Father Amon and the sacred nine of our eternal gods. And if he will do likewise, he and I, hand in hand, will rise to great power—of that he may be assured—and he is worthy of it. The rest of the debt of gratitude I still owe him I will find other means of paying, which as yet must remain undiscovered. But you may promise your uncle from me that I will take care of Nun, his worthy father, when the vengeance of the gods and of Pharaoh overtakes the other men of your nation. Already—tell him this likewise—is the sword set, and judgment without mercy shall be done on them. Tell him to ask himself what can fugitive shepherds do against the might of that army of which he himself is one of the captains?—Is your father yet alive, my son?”

“No; he was borne out long since,” replied Ephraim in a broken voice.

Was it that the fever of his wound was too much for him? That the disgrace of belonging to a race who could do such shameful deeds overpowered his young soul? Or was the youth true to his people, and was it wrath and indignation that made his cheek turn pale, then red, and stirred up such tur-

moil in his soul that he could hardly speak? No matter. But it was clear that he was no fit bearer of the prophet's message to his uncle, and the priest signed to the captain to come with him under the shade of a broad sycamore tree. The Hebrew must at any cost be retained with the army; he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder, saying: "You know that it was my wife who won you over to our great scheme. She serves it better and with greater zeal than many a man, and while I admire your daughter's beauty she is full of praises of her winning charm."

"And Kasana is to join the conspiracy?" exclaimed the soldier in displeasure.

"Not as an active partner, like my wife—of course not."

"She would hardly serve that end," replied the other in a calmer tone, "for she is like a child."

"And yet she may win over to our cause a man whose good-will appears to me to be inestimable."

"You mean Hosea?" asked Hornecht, and again his brow grew black, while the prophet went on:

"And if I do? Is he indeed a thorough Hebrew, and can you think it unworthy of the daughter of a warrior of valour to give her hand to the man who, if

our undertaking prospers, will act as chief captain over all the troops of the land?"

"No, my lord," cried the archer. "But one of the causes of my wrath against Pharaoh, and of my taking part with Siptah, is that his mother was not of our nation, while Egyptian blood flows in Siptah's veins. Now, the mother determines a man's race, and Hosea's mother was a Hebrew woman. I call him my friend; I know how to value his merits; Kasana is well inclined to him——"

"And yet you desire a greater son-in-law?" interrupted Baie. "How can our difficult enterprise prosper if those who risk their lives in it think the very first sacrifice too great? And your daughter, you say, is well inclined to Hosea?"

"She was; yes, truly," the soldier put in. "Yes, her heart longed after him. But I brought her to obedience; she became the wife of another; and now that she is a widow shall I be the one to offer her to him whom I compelled her to give up—the gods alone know how hardly? When was the like ever heard of in Egypt?"

"Whenever the men and women by the Nile have so far mastered themselves as to submit to necessity in opposition to their own wishes, for the sake of a great cause," replied the priest. "Thin

of these things. Remember, too, that Hosea's ancestress was an Egyptian—he has boasted of it in your presence—the daughter of a priest like myself.”

“But since then how many generations have passed to the grave!”

“That matters not. It brings him nearer to us and that must suffice. We shall meet again this evening. Meanwhile will you give hospitality to Hosea's nephew and bespeak your fair daughter's care, for he seems to need it sorely?”

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was mourning in the house of Hornecht, as in every house in the city. The men had shaved their heads and the women had strewn dust on their foreheads. The captain's wife was long since dead, but his daughter and her women met him with waving veils and loud wailing, for their lord's brother-in-law was bereft both of his first-born son and of his grandson; and in how many houses of their circle of friends had the plague claimed its victims!

However, the fainting youth demanded all the women's care; he was washed, and the deep wound in his head was freshly bound up; strong wine and food were set before him, and then, refreshed and strengthened, he followed at the bidding of his host's daughter.

The dust-stained and exhausted lad now stood revealed as a handsome young fellow. His scented hair flowed in long, waving locks from beneath the clean, white bandage, and his elastic, sunburnt

limbs were covered by Egyptian garments embroidered with gold, out of the wardrobe of the captain's deceased son-in-law. He seemed pleased to see himself in the handsome raiment, from which there proceeded a fragrance of spikenard new to his experience, for his black eyes brightly lighted up his well-cut features.

It was long since the captain's daughter had seen a better-favoured youth, and she herself was full of great and lovely charm. After a brief married life with a man she had never loved, Kasana within a year had come back a widow to her father's house, where there was now no mistress; and the great wealth of which she had become possessed by her husband's death enabled her to bring into the warrior's modest home the splendour and luxury which to her had become a necessity.

Her father, who in many a contest had proved himself a man of violent temper, now yielded to her will in all things. In past time he had ruthlessly asserted his own, and had forced her at the age of fifteen into a marriage with a man much older than herself. This he had done because he had observed that Kasana's young heart was set on Hosea, the man of war, and he deemed it beneath him to accept the Hebrew, who at that time held no place

of honor in the army, as a son-in-law. An Egyptian maiden could but obey her father without demur when he chose her a husband, and so Kasana had submitted, though during the period of her betrothal she shed so many bitter tears that the archer-captain was glad indeed when she had done his bidding and given her hand to the husband of his choice.

But even in her widowhood his daughter's heart clung to the Hebrew; for when the army was in the field she never ceased to be anxious, and spent her days and nights in troubled unrest. When tidings came from the front she asked only concerning Hosea, and it was to her love for him that Hornecht, with deep vexation, ascribed her repeated rejection of suitor after suitor. As a widow she had the right to dispose of her hand, and this gentle, yielding young creature would amaze her father by the abrupt decisiveness with which she made her independence felt, not alone to him and her suitors, but likewise to Prince Siptah, whose cause her father had made his own.

This day Kasana expressed her satisfaction at Hosea's home-coming so frankly and unreservedly that the hot-tempered man hastened out of the house lest he should be led into some ill-considered act or speech. He left the care of their young guest

to his daughter and her faithful nurse; and how delightful to the lad's sensitive soul was the effect of the warrior's home, with its lofty, airy rooms, open colonnades and bright and richly-colored paintings; its artistic vessels and ornaments, soft couches and all-pervading fragrance. All this was new and strange to the son of a pastoral land-owner, accustomed to live within the bare, gray walls of a spacious but perfectly graceless farm-dwelling; or, for months at a time, in canvas tents amid flocks and shepherds, and more often in the open air than under a roof or shelter. He felt as though by enchantment he had been transported to some higher and more desirable world, and as though he became it well in his splendid garb, with his oiled and perfumed curls and freshly-bathed limbs. Life, indeed, was everywhere fair, even out in the fields among the herds or in the cool of the evening round the fire in front of the tent, where the shepherds sang songs, and the hunters told tales of adventure, while the stars shone brightly overhead. But hard and hated labour had first to be done. Here it was a joy merely to gaze and breathe; and when presently the curtain was lifted and the young widow greeted him kindly and made him sit down by her, now questioning him and now listening sym-

pathetically to his replies, he almost fancied that he had lost his senses, as he had done under the ruins in the cellar, and that the sweetest of dreams was cheating him.

The feeling which now seemed to choke him, and again and again hindered his utterance, was surely the excess of bliss poured down upon him by great Astarte, the partner of Baal, of whom he had heard many tales from the Phœnician traders who supplied the shepherd settlers with various good things, and of whom he was forbidden by stern Miriam ever to speak at home.

His people had implanted in his young soul a hatred of the Egyptians as the oppressors of his race; but could they be so evil, could he abhor a nation among whom there were such beings to be found as the fair and gentle lady who looked so softly and yet so warmly into his eyes; whose speech bewitched his ear like sweet music, whose gaze set his blood in such swift motion that he could hardly bear it, and pressed his hand to his heart to still its wild throbbing?

There she sat opposite him on a stool covered with a panther skin, and drew the wool from the distaff. He had taken her fancy, and she had welcomed him warmly because he was kin to the man

she had loved from her childhood. She believed she could trace a likeness in him to Hosea, although the boy still lacked the gravity of the man to whom she had given her young heart, when and how she herself could not tell, for he had never sued for her love.

A lotos-flower was fastened into her well-arranged, waving black hair, and its stem lay in a graceful curve on her beht neck, round which hung a mass of beautiful curls. When she raised her eyes to look into his it was as though two deep wells opened before him to pour streams of bliss into his young breast, and that slender hand which spun the yarn he had already touched in greeting and held in his own.

Presently she inquired of him concerning Hosea and the woman who had sent him a message—whether she were young and fair, and whether there were any tie of love between her and his uncle. At this Ephraim laughed aloud. For she who had sent him was so grave and stern that the mere idea of her being capable of a tender emotion roused his mirth. As to whether she were fair, he had never given it a thought.

The young widow took this laughter as the most welcome reply she could hear, and with a sigh of

relief she laid aside the spindle she held and desired Ephraim to come with her into the garden.

How sweet it was with scent and bloom, how well trimmed were the beds, the paths, the arbours and the pool. The only pleasure of his simple home was a broad courtyard devoid of ornament, full of pens for cattle and sheep; yet he knew that some day he would be ruler over great possessions, for he was the only son and heir of a rich father, and his mother was a daughter of the wealthy Nun. The serving-men had told him all this many a time, and it vexed his soul to see that his own home was little better than the quarters for the Captain's slaves, which Kasana pointed out to him.

As they rambled through the garden she bid Ephraim help her to pluck some flowers, and when the basket which he carried for her was full, she invited him to sit with her in an arbour and lend a hand in twining garlands. These were offerings to the beloved dead. Her uncle and a favourite cousin—somewhat like Ephraim himself—had been snatched away during the past night by the pestilence, which his people had brought upon Tanis.

And from the street which ran along the garden-wall the wailing of women was incessantly heard, as they mourned over the dead or bore a corpse to its

burying; and when suddenly it rose louder and more woful than before, she gently reproached him for all that the people of Tanis had suffered for the sake of the Hebrews, and asked him if he could deny that her nation had good reason to hate a race that had brought such plagues upon it.

To this he found it difficult to answer discreetly, for he had been told that it was the God of his people who had stricken the Egyptians, to release his own from oppression and slavery, and he dared not deny or condemn his own flesh and blood. So he was silent, that he might neither lie nor blaspheme, but she gave him no peace, and at last he made answer that all which brought sorrow on her was repugnant to him, but that his people had no power over health and life, for that when a Hebrew was sick he very commonly applied to an Egyptian leech. What had now come to pass was no doubt the act of the great God of his fathers, who was of more might than all other gods. He, at any rate, was a Hebrew, and she might believe him when he assured her that he was guiltless of the pestilence, and that he would gladly call her uncle and cousin back to life again if he had it in his power. For her sake he was ready to do anything, even the hardest task.

She smiled on him sweetly, and said: "Poor boy! If I find a fault in you, it is only that you belong to a race to whom forbearance and pity are alike unknown. Alas! for our hapless and beloved dead. They must even be deprived of the songs of lamentation of those who mourn for them; for the house where they lie is plague-stricken and none may enter there."

She dried her eyes and said no more, but went on winding her garland; but tear after tear rolled down her cheeks. He knew not what more to say, and could only hand her flowers and leaves. Whenever her hand chanced to touch his the blood coursed hotly through his veins. His head and the wound began to ache violently, and now and then he shivered. He felt that the fever was gaining on him, as it had once before, when he had nearly lost his life in the red sickness, but he was ashamed to confess it, and held out against it.

When the sun was already low the Captain came out into the garden. He had already seen Hosea, and although he was sincerely glad to meet his trusted friend once more, he had been ill pleased and uneasy that, before all else, he had made warm inquiry for his daughter. He did not conceal this from Kasana, but the glare of his eyes revealed the

dissatisfaction with which he greeted her from the Hebrew. Then he turned to Ephraim, and told him that Hosea with his host had halted outside the city, by reason of the plague. They were to pitch their tents without its precincts, between Tanis and the sea. They must presently go forth to the camp, and his uncle sent him word that he was to seek him there in his tent.

When he saw the lad helping his daughter to wind the funeral wreaths he smiled, exclaiming: "Only this morning this young lordling longed to be free and a ruler all his life, and now he has entered your service, Kasana. Nay, do not blush, my young friend. And if either your mistress or your uncle can prevail upon you to become one of us, and devote yourself to the noblest toil—that of a warrior—it will be well for you. Look at me! For more than forty years have I wielded the bow, and to this day I rejoice in my calling. I have to obey, to be sure, but I have also to command, and the thousands that do my bidding are not sheep and beasts, but brave men. Consider the matter once more. He would make a splendid chief of the bowmen; what do you say, Kasana?"

"Certainly," replied the lady, and she had it in her mind to say more, but beyond the garden-wall

the measured tread of approaching troops fell on the ear. The bright blood mounted to her cheeks, her eyes glowed with a flame which startled Ephraim, and, heedless of her father or her guest, she flew past the pool, across the avenues and flower-beds, up a turf-bank near the wall to gaze with eager eyes out into the road and on the armed host which presently came past.

Hosea marched at its head in full armor. He turned his grave face as he came by the Captain's garden, and when he saw Kasana he lowered his battle axe in friendly greeting. Ephraim had followed with the Captain, who pointed out Hosea and said: "A bright weapon like that would well become you, too, and when the drum is beating and the pipe squeaking, while the standards ride high over head, a man marches as lightly as though he had wings. To-day the martial music is silenced by reason of the dreadful grief that the malignant Hebrew has brought upon us. Hosea, indeed, is of his race; yet, little as I can overlook that fact, I must confess that he is a thorough soldier and a model for the younger generation. Only tell him what I think of him in this respect. Now, bid farewell at once to Kasana and follow the troops; the little side-gate in the wall is open."

As he spoke he turned to go back into the house, and Ephraim held out his hand to bid the young woman farewell. She gave him hers, but instantly withdrew it, saying: "How hot your hand is. You are in a fever!"

"Nay, nay," murmured the boy; but even as he spoke he dropped on his knees, and a cloud came over the suffering lad's soul, chased as it had been from one emotion to another.

Kasana was startled, but she at once recovered her presence of mind, and proceeded to cool his brow and the top of his head with water out of the adjacent pool. And as she did so she looked anxiously in his face, and never had his likeness to Hosea struck her so vividly. Yes, the man she loved must have exactly resembled this youth when he himself was a boy. Her heart beat faster, and as she supported his head in her hands she softly kissed him.

She thought he was unconscious, but the refreshing moisture had recovered him from his brief swoon, and he felt the touch with a sweet thrill, but kept his eyes shut, and would have lain thus for a lifetime with his head on her bosom, in the hope that her lips might once more meet his. Instead of kissing him again she called loudly for help. At

this he roused himself, gave one more passionate, fervid look into her face, and, before she could stop him, fled like a strong man to the garden-door, pushed it open and was gone after the host. He soon caught up the rear, soon overtook the others, and at last, finding himself by the Captain's side, he called to his uncle and announced himself by name. At this Hosea, in his joy and surprise, held out his arms; but almost before Ephraim could fall upon his neck he again lost consciousness, and strong soldiers carried the lad into the tent which the quartermasters had already pitched on a sand-hill by the sea.

CHAPTER V.

It was midnight. A fire burned before Hosea's tent and he sat alone beside it, gazing sadly and thoughtfully first into the flames and then out into the distance. The lad Ephraim was lying inside the tent on his uncle's camp bed.

The leech who accompanied the troops had dressed the youth's wound, and having given him a strengthening draught bade him remain quiet, for he was alarmed at the high fever that had fallen on him.

But Ephraim found not the rest the physician had advised. The image of Kasana now rose before his imagination and added fire to his already overheated blood. Then his thoughts flew to the advice that he should become a warrior like his uncle; and it seemed to him reasonable, because it promised him glory and honor, as he would fain persuade himself, though in truth he desired to follow it because it would bring him nearer to her whom his soul longed for.

Then again his pride rebelled when he thought of the insult with which she and her father had branded those to whom he belonged by blood and sympathy. He clinched his fist as he remembered the ruined house of his grandfather, whom he had always considered the most reverend of men. Nor had he forgotten his message. Miriam had said it over to him several times, and his clear memory held it word for word; also at intervals he had repeated it over to himself as he wandered on the lonely way to Tanis. Now he endeavoured to do so again, but before he could get to the end his mind carried him back to thoughts of Kasana. The doctor had ordered Hosea to forbid any talking, so when the patient tried to deliver his message he bade him be silent. Then the soldier smoothed his pillow as gently as a mother might, gave him his medicine, and kissed him on the brow.

At last he sat down by the fire in front of the tent, and only rose to give the youth a drink when the stars showed him that an hour had passed.

The flames lighted up Hosea's somewhat dark features, and showed them to be those of a man who had faced many dangers, and had vanquished them by stern perseverance and prudent reflection. His black eyes wore a domineering expression, and

his full, tightly-closed mouth gave evidence of a hot temper, but even more of the iron will of a determined man. His broad-shouldered frame leaned against a sheaf of spears set crossing each other in the ground, and when he drew his powerful hand through his thick black hair, or stroked his dark beard, while his eyes lighted up with wrath, it might be seen that his soul was seething and that he stood on the threshold of some great resolve.

As yet the lion rests, but when he springs up his enemies must beware.

His soldiers had often compared their bold, strong-willed leader, with his mane-like hair, to the king of beasts; and now he shook his fist, and at the same time the muscles of his brown arm swelled as though they would burst the gold bands that surrounded them, bright flames flashed from his eyes, and he was an unapproachable and awesome presence.

Out there in the west, whither he turned his gaze, lay the city of the dead and the ruined strangers' quarters. A few hours since he had led his troops past his father's dismantled house and through the deserted town, round which the ravens were flying.

Speechless, for he was still on duty, he had

passed it by; and it was not until they had halted that quarters might be found for his troops that he learned the events of the previous night from Hornecht, the captain of the archers. He had listened in silence and without moving a muscle or asking one word of further information, and meanwhile the soldiers had pitched the tents; but scarcely had he gone to rest when a lame Hebrew girl, in spite of the threats of the watch, forced her way in and besought him, in the name of Eliab, one of the oldest slaves of his house, whose granddaughter she was, to go with her to the old man. He had been left behind, as feebleness and ill health prevented his wandering, and directly after the departure of his people he and his wife had been brought on an ass to the little cottage by the harbour which had been given to the old servant by his generous master.

The girl, too, had been left to look after the infirm couple, and now the heart of the old slave was longing to see once more the first-born of his lord, whom as a child he had carried in his arms. He had bidden the girl tell the captain that his father had promised that he, Hosea, would leave the Egyptians and follow his people. The tribe of Ephraim, yea, the whole race, had heard the news with great rejoicing. The grandfather would give

him more news, for she herself had been nearly out of her mind with trouble and anxiety. He would deserve the richest blessings if he would only go with her.

The warrior perceived from the first that he must fulfil this wish, but he had postponed the visit to the old man until the next morning. The messenger, though in haste, managed to inform him of several things that she had seen or heard of from others.

At last she was gone. He made up the fire, and as long as the flames blazed brightly he looked with a dark and thoughtful gaze toward the west. It was not till they had consumed the fuel, and only flickered, feeble and blue over the charred wood, that he fixed his eyes on the embers and the flying sparks, and the longer he did so the deeper and more insurmountable did he feel the discord in his soul, which only yesterday had been set on a single glorious aim.

For a year and a half he had been far from home fighting against Libyan rebels, and for fully ten months he had not heard a word from his people. A few weeks since he had been ordered home, and his heart beat with joy and hopefulness, and he, a man of thirty, had felt a boy again as he

drew nearer and nearer to Tanis, the city of Rameses, famed for its obelisks.

In a few hours he would once more behold his beloved and worthy father, who had only after deep consideration and at the persuasion of his mother—now long since departed in peace—allowed him to follow his own inclinations and devote himself to military service and Pharaoh's army. This very day he had hoped to surprise him with the news that he had been promoted above other and older captains of Egyptian race.

The neglect which Nun had feared for his son had, through his entire devotion, his valour, and, as he modestly added, his good luck, been turned to advancement; and yet he had not ceased to be a Hebrew. When in offering sacrifice and prayer, he had felt the need of acknowledging a god, he had worshipped Set, into whose sanctuary his own father had led him as a child, and whom, at that time, all the Semitic race in Goshen had worshipped. For him, however, there was another god, and this was not the God of his fathers, but the god who was confessed by all those Egyptians who had received initiation, though he remained hidden from the people, who were not able to comprehend him. It was not only the adepts that knew him, but also

most of those who were placed in high positions in the service of the state and in the army—whether they were ministers of the divinity or not—and he likewise, though a stranger and not of the initiated. All of these knew what was meant when allusion was made to “The God,” the “Sum of All,” the “Creator of Himself” or the “Great One.” Hymns praised him, epitaphs which every one could read spoke of this, the only god who revealed himself in the world, who was co-existent and co-equal with the universe, immanent in all creation, not merely as life exists in the body of man, but as being himself the sum total of created things, the universe itself in its perennial growth, decay and resurrection, himself obeying the laws he had laid down. His essence, dwelling in every part of himself, dwelt likewise in man; and look where he might, a mortal could perceive the presence and action of the One. Without him nothing could be conceived of, and thus he was One, like the God of his fathers. Without him nothing could come into being nor any event happen on earth. Thus, like the God of Israel, he was almighty. Hosea had long been wont to think of these gods as essentially the same, and differing only in name. He who worshipped one he deemed was the servant of the other; and so the captain of the host could,

with a clear conscience, have stood before his parent and have told him that he had been as faithful to the God of his people as he had been as a warrior in the service of the king.

And there was something else which had made his heart beat faster and more gladly as he saw from afar the pylons and obelisks of Tanis, for in his endless marches across the silent desert, and in many a lonely camp-tent, the image had haunted his vision of a maiden of his own people, whom he had first known as a strange child stirred by wondrous thoughts, and whom he had seen again as a woman grown, unapproachable in her dignity and severe beauty, not long before he had last led his host to the Libyan war. She had come from Succoth to Tanis to his mother's burial; her image had been deeply stamped on his heart, and his—he dared to hope—on hers. She had now become a prophetess, hearing the voice of God. While the other daughters of Israel were strictly secluded, she had asserted her freedom, even among men; and in spite of her hatred for the Egyptians, and for his place among them, she had not concealed from Hosea that to part from him was grief and that she would never cease to think of him. His wife, when he should wed, must be as strong and grave as himself, and Miriam was

both, and cast another and brighter image, of which he once had loved to dream, quite into the shade.

He was fond of children, and a sweeter child than Kasana he had never seen, either in Egypt or in distant lands. The sympathy with which this fair daughter of his comrade-in-arms had watched his achievements and his fortunes, and the modest, tender affection which the much courted young widow had since shown him, had brought him much joy in times of peace. Before her marriage he had thought of her as growing up to be his wife; but her union with another and her father's repeated declaration that he would never give his daughter to wife to a foreigner had wounded his pride and cooled his ardour. Then he had met Miriam, and she had inspired him with a fervent desire to call her his own. And though, as he marched homeward, the thought of seeing Kasana once more had been pleasing to him, he was well content that he no longer wished to marry her, for it must have led to much vexation. The Egyptians and Hebrews alike deemed it an abomination to eat at each other's table, or to use the same seats or knives; and though, as a fellow-soldier he was accepted as one of themselves, and had often heard the young widow's father speak kindly of his people, still "the

strangers" were hateful in the sight of Hornecht and his household.

In Miriam he had found the noblest help-mate. Kasana might yet make another happy. Henceforth she could be no more to him than a delightful child, from whom we look for nothing but the pleasure of her sweet presence. He had learned to ask nothing of her beyond a glad smile, always at his service. Of Miriam he demanded herself, in all her lofty beauty, for he had long enough endured the loneliness of a camp life, and now that no mother's arms were open to the home-comer he felt the emptiness of his single state. He longed once more to feel glad in times of peace, when he laid down his arms after perils and privations of every kind. It was his duty to take a wife home to dwell under his father's roof and to provide that the noble race of which he was the only male descendant should not die out. Ephraim was only his sister's son.

His heart uplifted with such glad thoughts as these, he had come back to Tanis, and had almost reached the goal of his hopes and wishes, when behold! there lay before him, as it were, a field of corn destroyed by hail and swarms of locusts.

And as though in mockery, fate brought him

first to what had been the home of his fathers. Where the house had once stood in which he had grown up, and for which his heart had longed, there lay a dust-heap of ruins. Where those near and dear to him had proudly watched him depart, beggars were searching for booty in the rubbish.

Kasana's father was the first to hold out a hand to him in Tanis, and instead of a glance of kindly welcome he had from him nothing but a tale of woe that had cut him to the heart. He had dreamed of fetching home a wife, and the house in which she should have been mistress was level with the earth. The father whose blessing he craved, and who was to have rejoiced over his promotion, was by this time far away, and the foe henceforth of the sovereign to whom he himself owed his elevation.

It had been a proud thought that, in spite of his birth, he had risen to power and dignity, and that now, as the leader of a great army, he might indeed show of what great deeds he was capable. There was no lack of schemes in his fertile brain, plans which, if they had been ratified by the authorities, might have led to good issues; and now he was in a position to carry them out at his own pleasure, and be himself the motor-power instead of the tool. All this had roused a delightful exultation in his

breast, and had lent wings to his feet on the homeward march; and now, when he had reached the longed-for goal, was he to turn back, to become the comrade of shepherds and masons? By birth, indeed, he belonged to them (and how hard a fortune did that at this moment seem), though there was no denying that they were now as alien to him as the Libyans against whom he had taken the field. On almost every point for which he cared he had nothing whatever in common with them. To his father's question as to whether he had returned still a Hebrew, he had believed he might truly answer, Yes; but now he felt that it would be against his will, a less than half-hearted adhesion.

His soul clung to the standards under which he had marched to battle, and which he now might himself lead to victory. Was it possible to tear himself from them, and forfeit all he had won by his own merit? But had he not heard from the grandchild of his old slave, Eliab, that his people expected him to quit the army and follow them? A messenger must ere long arrive from his father—and among the Hebrews a son might not resist a parent's command.

Yet there was another to whom he owed strict obedience—Pharaoh, to whom he had sworn that he

would serve him faithfully and follow his call without hesitation or reflection, through fire and water, by night or day. How many a time had he stigmatized a soldier who should go over to the foe or rebel against the orders of his chief as a wretch devoid of honour, and many a one who had deserted from his standard had perished shamefully on the gallows under his own eye. And should he now commit the crime for which he had scorned others or done them to death? He was known for his swift decisiveness throughout the army, for even in the greatest straits he could arrive at the right determination and reduce it to action; but in this dark and lonely hour he seemed to himself as a bending reed, as helpless as a deserted orphan.

A gnawing rage against himself possessed him wholly, and when he presently thrust his spearhead into the fire, so that the glowing brands fell in and the sparks danced brightly up into the night, it was fury at his own vacillating mind that spurred his hand.

If the events of the past night had called him to the manly task of revenge, all hesitation and doubt would have vanished, and his father's call would have determined him to act; but who had here been the victims of ill-usage? Beyond doubt

the Egyptians, who had been bereft by Moses' curse of thousands of precious lives, while his people had escaped their vengeance by flight. To find the home of his fathers destroyed by the Egyptians had, indeed, roused his wrath; but he saw no just cause for a bloody revenge when he reflected on the unutterable woe which had come upon Pharaoh and his subjects through the Hebrews.

No. He had no revenge to take; he could only look upon himself as one who sees his father and mother in danger of their lives, and knows that he cannot save both, but if he risks his own life to rescue one the other must certainly perish. If he obeyed the call of his people honour was lost—that honour which he had kept as bright as the brass of his helmet—and with it all he most hoped for in life; if he remained faithful to Pharaoh he was betraying his own blood, his father's curse would darken the light of all his days, and he must renounce all his fairest dreams for the future; for Miriam was a true daughter of her tribe, and woe to him if her lofty soul could hate as bitterly as it could love fervently.

Her image rose before his mind's eye, tall and beautiful, but with a dark look and warning mien, as he sat gazing across the dying fire out into the

night; and his manly pride surged up, and it seemed to him a mean thing to risk everything that is dear to the warrior's heart for fear of a woman's wrath and blame.

"No, no," he murmured to himself, and the scale which held duty and love and filial obedience and the ties of blood suddenly kicked the beam. He was what he was—the captain of ten thousand in the king's army. He had sworn allegiance to him and to none other. His people! Let them run away if they chose from the Egyptian yoke! He scorned flight. Bondage had lain heavy on them; but as for him, the mightiest in the land had treated him as their equal and held him worthy of high honour. To repay their good will with treason and desertion went against him, and with a deep breath he started to his feet, feeling as though he had chosen rightly. A woman and a weak desire for love to fill his heart should never lead him to be false to grave duty and the highest aims of his existence.

"I remain!" cried a loud voice in his breast, "My father is wise and kind, and when he hears my reasons he will approve them, and instead of cursing he will bless me. I will write to him, and the boy that Miriam sent to me shall be my messenger."

A cry from the tent made him start; looking at the stars he found he had neglected his duty toward the sick youth and went quickly to his bedside.

Ephraim was sitting up expecting him, and cried to him: "I have been wanting you a long time. So much has passed through my mind, and, above all, the message from Miriam. Till I have delivered it I shall not find any rest, so hear me now."

Hosea nodded assent, and after the youth had taken the healing draught that he handed him, he began:

"Miriam, the daughter of Amram and Jochebed, sends greeting to the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim. Hosea, or the Helper, is thy name, and the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be the helper of his people. And henceforth thou shalt be called Joshua*, Holpen of Jehovah. For the God of her fathers, who is the God of thy fathers also, hath spoken by Miriam, his handmaid, commanding thee to be the shield and sword of thy people. In him is all power, and His promise is to strengthen thine arm that He may smite the enemy."

Or more correctly Jehoshua.

The lad began in a low tone, but his voice gradually grew stronger, and the last words rang loud and solemn in the silence of the night.

Thus had Miriam spoken to him, and had laid her hands on his head and looked earnestly into his eyes with her own, which were as black as the night, and as Ephraim repeated her words he had felt as though some secret power compelled him to cry them aloud to Hosea, as he had heard them from the mouth of the prophetess. Then he breathed a sigh of relief, turned his face to the white canvas wall of the tent, and said quietly:

“Now I will sleep.”

But Hosea laid his hand on his shoulder and said in commanding tones: “Say it again.”

The lad did his bidding, but this time he repeated the words unheeding and in a low tone to himself. Then he said imploringly: “Leave me to rest,” put his hand under his cheek and shut his eyes.

Hosea let him have his way. He gently laid a fresh wet bandage over his burning head, put out the light and cast more logs on the dying fire outside; but the keen, resolute man did it all as in a dream. At last he sat down, resting his elbows on his knees and his head on his hand,

with his eyes fixed on vacancy or gazing at the flames.

Who was this God who called him through Miriam to be, by His aid, the sword and shield of his people?

He was to bear a new name, and to the Egyptians the name was the man. "Honour to the name of Pharaoh!" not "to Pharaoh," was written in every inscription and document; and if henceforth he was to be called Joshua this involved a command to cast the old man off and to become a new man. This, which Miriam had declared to him as the will of the God of his fathers, was nothing less than a bidding to cease to be an Egyptian, as his life had made him, and become a Hebrew again, as he had been as a boy.

He must learn to act and feel as a Hebrew.

And Miriam's message required him to go back to his own tribe. The God of his nation, through her, bade him to do what his father expected of him. Instead of the Egyptian host, which he must now leave, henceforth he should lead the sons of Israel when they went forth to battle; this was the meaning of her words; and when that high-souled maiden and prophetess declared that it was God Himself who spoke by her mouth, it was no

vain boast; she was certainly obeying the voice of the Most High. And now the image of the woman whom he had dared to love appeared to him as unapproachably sublime; many things which he had heard in his childhood of the God of Abraham and His promises, recurred to his mind; and the scale which till now had been the heavier gradually rose. What had but just now seemed firmly settled was no longer sure, and once more he stood face to face with the fearful gulf which he fancied he had overleaped.

How loud and mighty was the call he had heard! The sound in his ears disturbed his clearness and peace of mind. Instead of calmly weighing the matter as he had done before, memories of his boyhood, which he had fancied long since buried, lifted up their voices and disconnected flashes of thought confused his brain.

Sometimes he felt prompted to turn in prayer to the God who called him, but as often as he made the attempt he remembered the oath he must break, and the vast host he must leave behind him, to become the leader, no more of a well-trained, brave, obedient troop of brothers-in-arms, but of a miserable horde of cowardly serfs and wild, obstinate shepherds accustomed to the rule of oppression.

It was three hours past midnight. The men on guard had been relieved, and he began to think of giving himself a few hours' rest. He would think the matter out again by daylight with his wonted rational decisiveness, which he now felt he could not attain to. But as he entered the tent, and Ephraim's steady breathing fell on his ear, in fancy he heard again the lad's solemn delivery of his message. It startled him, and he was about to repeat the words to himself when he heard a tumult among the outposts, and a vehement dispute broke the stillness of the night.

The interruption was welcome. He hurried out to where the guards were posted.

CHAPTER VI.

HOGLAH, the grand-daughter of the old slave Eliab, had come to entreat Hosea to go with her forthwith to see her grandfather, whose strength had suddenly failed him, and who, feeling death near at hand, could not die without seeing him and blessing him once more. So the captain bade her wait, and after assuring himself that Ephraim slept peacefully, he charged a man he could trust to keep watch over the lad, and went with Hoglah.

As she led the way she carried a small lantern, and when the light fell on the girl's face and figure, he saw how ill-favoured she was, for slave's toil had bent the poor child's back before its time. Her voice had the rough tones which a woman's tongue often acquires when her strength is too unsparingly taxed; but all she said was loving and kind, and Hosea forgot her appearance as she told him that she had a lover among the men who had gone forth, but that she had remained behind with her grand-

parents, for she could not bring herself to leave the old folks alone; that as she was not fair to look upon, no man had coveted her as his wife till Asser had come, and he did not look to appearances, because he was hard-working, as she herself was, and had expected that she would help to save his earnings. He would have been willing to stay behind with her, but his father had commanded him to set out with him; so he had no choice, but must obey and part from her forever.

The tale was simply told, and in a harsh accent, but it struck to the heart of the man who, for his part, meant to go his own way in opposition to his father.

As they presently came in sight of the harbour, and Hosea looked down on the quays and the huge fortified storehouses, built by the hands of his own people, he thought once more of the ragged troops of labourers whom he had so often seen cringing before the Egyptian overseer, or again, fighting madly among themselves. He had marked, too, that they did not hesitate to lie and cheat in order to escape their toil, and how hard it was to compel them to obey and do their duty!

The more odious objects among these hapless

hundreds rose clearly before his mind, and the thought that perhaps his fate in the future might be to lead such a wretched crew came over him as a disgrace which the humblest of his subalterns, the captain of fifty, would fain be spared. There were, of course, among the mercenaries of Pharaoh's armies many Hebrews who had won a reputation for courage and endurance, but these were the sons of owners of herds or of men who had been shepherds. The toiling multitude whose clay hovels could be overturned with a kick formed the greater mass of those to whom he was bidden to return.

Firmly resolved to remain faithful to the oath which bound him to the standard of the Egyptian host, and yet stirred to the depths of his soul, he entered the slave's hut, and his vexation was increased when he found the old man sitting up and mixing some wine and water with his own hand. So he had been brought away from his nephew's bedside on a false pretence, and deprived of his own night's rest that a slave, who, in his eyes, was scarcely a man at all, should have his way! Here he himself was the victim of a trick of that cunning selfishness which, in the Egyptians' eyes, was the reproach of his people, and which, indeed, did not attract him to them. But the wrath of the clear-

sighted and upright man was soon appeased as he saw the girl's unfeigned delight at her grandfather's rapid recovery; and he then learned from the aged wife that Hoglah had hardly set out on her quest when they remembered that they had some wine in the house, and after the first draught her husband got better and better, though she had before thought he had one foot already in the grave. Now he was mixing some more of the blessed gift to strengthen himself with a draught of it every now and then.

Here the old man himself broke in, and said that he owed this and much that was better to the goodness of Nun, Hosea's father; for besides this hut, and wine and meal for bread, he had given him a milch cow and likewise an ass, on which he could often ride out and take the air, and he had left him his grand-daughter and some silver, so that they could look forward with contentment to their end; all the more so as they had a patch of land behind the house, which Hoglah would sow with radishes, onions and leeks for their pottage. But best of all was the written deed which made them and the girl free forever. Aye, Nun was a true lord and father to his people, and his good gifts had brought with them the blessing of the Most High, for immediately after the departure of the Hebrews, by the help of

Asser, Hoglah's betrothed, he and his wife had been conveyed hither without any demur or difficulty.

"We old folks," the old woman added, "will die here. But Asser has promised Hoglah to come back for her when she has done her duty to her parents to the very last." And turning to the girl she said in an encouraging tone: "And it cannot be for much longer now."

At this Hoglah began to wipe her eyes with the skirt of her blue gown, and cried: "Long, long may it be! I am young. I can wait."

Hosea heard the words, and it seemed to him as though the poor, ill-favoured, deserted girl was giving him a lesson.

He had let the old folks talk on, but his time was precious, and he now asked whether it was for any special cause that Eliab had sent for him.

"I could not help sending," was the answer, "and not only to ease the longing of my old heart, but because my lord Nun had bidden me to do so.

"Great and noble is thy manhood, and now art thou become the hope of Israel! Thy father, too, hath promised the men and women of his house

that after his death thou shalt be their lord and their head. His speech was full of thy glory, and great was the rejoicing when he declared that thou wouldst follow the departing tribes. And I am he whom my lord vouchsafed to command that, if thou shouldst return before his messenger could reach thee, I was to say that Nun, thy father, awaited his son. Whithersoever thy people go it is for thee to follow. By sunrise, or more nearly at midday, thy people shall stay to rest by Succoth. He would hide a writing in the hollow sycamore before the house of Aminadab, which should tell thee whither next they take their way. His blessing and the blessing of our God be with thee in the way!"

As the old man pronounced the last words Hosea bent his head, as though to invite an invisible hand to rest on it. Then he thanked the old man and asked in a subdued voice whether all had been willing to obey the call to quit house and home.

The old woman clasped her hands, exclaiming: "No, no, my lord; by no means. What a wailing and weeping there was before they went away! Many rebelled, others escaped or sought some hole or corner wherein to hide. But in vain. In the house of our neighbour Deguel—you know him—his

young wife had been lately brought to bed with a boy, her first-born. What would become of the poor creature on the journey? At first she wept bitterly and her husband blasphemed, but there was no help for it. She and her infant were laid in a cart, and as things went forward they got over it, he and she both, like all the rest; even Phineas, who crept into a pigeon-house with his wife and five children, and even old crippled Graveyard Keziah—you remember her, Adonai?—she had seen her father and mother die, her husband, and then five well-grown sons; everything the Lord had given her to love, and had laid them one after another in our graveyard; and every morning and evening she would go to their resting-place, and as she sat there on a log of wood which she had rolled close to the tombstone her lips would always be moving; but what she muttered was not prayer; no—I have listened to her many a time when she did not heed me—no; she talked with the dead as if they could hear her in the tomb, and could understand her speech like those who live in the light of the sun. She is nigh upon threescore years old, and for three times seven years she has been known to the folk about as Graveyard Keziah. It was a senseless way she had, but for that very reason perhaps it was doubly hard to her

to give it up; and she would not go, but hid away behind the shrubs. When Ahiezer, the head of her house, dragged her forth, her wailing was enough to make your heart ache. But when it came to the last she plucked up courage and could not bear to stay behind any more than the rest."

"What had come over the poor wretches? What possessed them?" Hosea here broke in, interrupting the old woman's flow of words; for his fancy again pictured the people that he ought to, nay, that he must lead, as surely as he held his father's blessing of price above all else; and he saw them in all their misery. The old woman started, and, fearing lest she might have angered the first-born son of her master, this proud and lordly warrior, she stammered out:

"What possessed them, my lord? Aye, well—I am but a poor, simple slave woman; but indeed, my lord, if you had but been there also——"

"Well, what then?" cried the soldier roughly and impatiently; for now, for the first time in his life, he found himself compelled to act against his inclinations and convictions.

At this the old man tried to come to his wife's rescue, saying, timidly;

"Nay, my lord, tongue cannot tell of it, nor the understanding conceive of it. It came upon Israel from the Lord, and even if I could describe how mightily He worked in the souls of the people——"

"Try," said Hosea, "but my time is short. Then they were forced to depart? It was against their will that they took up their staff? That they have followed Moses and Aaron for some time past, as sheep follow the shepherd, is known even to the Egyptians. And have those men, who brought down the pestilence on so many innocent beings, worked a miracle to blind the eyes of you and your wife here?"

The old man lifted supplicating hands to the warrior, and replied, much troubled, in a tone of humble entreaty: "Oh, my lord, you are the first-born son of my master, the greatest and noblest of his house, and if you will you can tread me in the dust like a beetle; and yet will I lift up my voice and tell you they have told you falsely. You have been among strangers all this year while mighty signs have been wrought upon us. You were far from Zoan*, as I have heard, when the people went forth. For any son of our race who had be-

* The Hebrew name for Tanis.

held this thing would sooner that his tongue should wither in his mouth than laugh to scorn the mighty things which the Lord has vouchsafed to us to behold. If you had patience, indeed, and could grant me to tell the story——”

“Speak,” cried Hosea, amazed at the old man’s fervour; and Eliab thanked him with a glowing look, and cried:

“Ah! would that Aaron, or Eleazar, or my lord Nun, your father, were here; or that the Most High would grant me the gift of their speech! But as it is, well. And, indeed, meseems as though I saw and heard it all, as though it were all happening again; and yet how may I tell it? But by God’s help I will try.”

He paused, and as Hosea saw that the old man’s lips and hands trembled, he himself reached him the cup, and the old man thankfully emptied it to the bottom. Then he began with half-closed eyes and his wrinkled features grew more keenly eager as he proceeded with his tale:

“What befell after that it became known what command had come to the people, my wife has already told you, and we, too, were among those who lost heart and murmured. But last night we all

who were of the house of Nun were bidden to the feast—even the shepherds and the slaves and the poor—and there we ate of roast lamb and fresh unleavened bread, and had plenty of wine, more than usual at the harvest festival which begins on that night, and which you yourself have often witnessed as a boy. There we sat and enjoyed ourselves, and my lord, your father, spoke words of encouragement and told us of the God of our fathers and of the great things He had done for his people. Now, said he, it was the Lord's will that we should set forth and depart out of this land, where we have borne contempt and bondage. This was no such sacrifice as that for which Abraham had sharpened his knife to shed the blood of his son Isaac withal, at the bidding of the Most High, although it would fall hardly on us to leave a home grown dear to us and many an old custom. Nay, it would at last bring much happiness on us all. For, cried he, we were not to wander forth into the unknown, but toward a lordly land which God himself had set before us. He had promised us a new home instead of this land of bondage, where we should dwell as free men on fruitful meadows and find rich pastures where a man and his household might be fed and their hearts made glad. Just as a man must work

hard to earn his wage, so were we to endure a brief space of privation and sorrow to earn that beautiful new home for ourselves and our children, as the Lord had promised. A land of God it must surely be, since it was the gift of the Most High.

"Thus he spoke, and thus he blessed us all, and promised that you, too, would shake the dust from off your feet and join yourself to the people, and fight for them with a strong arm as an experienced warrior and an obedient son.

"Hereupon we all shouted for joy; and when we were all gathered in the market place and found that all the bondsmen had been able to escape from the overseers our courage rose. Then came Aaron into our midst and stood upon the salesman's bench, and all that my lord Nun had spoken at the feast we now heard from his lips, and the words he spoke sounded now like rolling thunder and now like the sweet tones of the lute, and we all knew that it was the Lord our God who spoke by him, for he touched the hearts even of the rebellious, so that they murmured and complained no more. And when at last he proclaimed to the multitude that no erring man, but the Lord God himself, would be our Captain; when he described the beauty of the promised land,

whose gates He would open before us and where we should dwell as free and happy men, released from all bondage, owing no obedience to any but to the God of our fathers and those whom we may choose for our leaders, it was as though every man there was drunk with new wine, and as if the way that lay before them, instead of a barren track across the desert into the unknown, led to a great feast spread for them by the Most High Himself. Nay, and even those who had not heard Aaron's words were likewise filled with marvelous confidence, and men and women were all more cheerful and noisy than their wont at the harvest feast, for all hearts overflowed with pure thankfulness. It even seized the old folks. Old Elishama, the father of Nun, who is a hundred years old, and as you know has long sat bent and silent in his seat, rose up with a light in his eyes and spoke fiery words. The spirit of the Lord had come upon him as upon us all.

"I felt myself quite young again in body and soul, and as I passed by the host as it made ready for its departing I saw Elisheba with her babe in a litter, and she looked as happy as on the day of her marriage, and pressed her infant to her heart and blessed his lot in growing up in the Promised Land and free. And her husband, Deguel,

who had blasphemed the loudest, swung his staff and kissed his wife and child with tears of joy in his eyes, and shouted for joy like a vintager at the pressing when jars and wine skins are too small to hold the blessing. The old woman, too, Graveyard Keziah, who had torn herself away from the tombs of her race, sat with other feeble folk in a chariot, and waved her veil and joined in the hymn of praise which Elkanah and Abiasaph, the sons of Korah, had begun. And thus they set forth. We who were left behind fell into each other's arms, and knew not whether the tears we shed flowed from our eyes for grief or for overjoy at seeing the multitude of those we loved so glad and full of hope. Thus it came to pass.

"Pitch torches were carried in front of the multitude, seeming to light it up more brightly than the great blaze of lamps which the Egyptians light up at the gates of the temple to Neith, and it was not till they were swallowed up in the darkness that we set forth, so as not to keep Asser too long behind the rest. As we made our way through the night, the streets were full of the mourning cry of the citizens, but we sang softly the hymn of the sons of Korah, and great joy and peace fell upon us, for we knew that the Lord our God would keep and lead His people."

Here the old man ceased, but his wife and the girl, who had hearkened to him with eager eyes, drew closer to each other, and without any word between them they both together began the hymn of praise, and the old woman's thin voice mingled with pathetic fervour with the harsh tones of the girl, ennobled as they were by lofty enthusiasm.

Hosea felt that it would be wicked to break in on this overflow of full hearts, but the old man presently bade them cease and looked up at his master's first-born son with anxious inquiry in his grave features.

Had Hosea understood?

Had he made it plain to this warrior who served Pharaoh how that the Lord God himself had ruled the souls of His people at their departing?

Was Hosea so fallen away from his own nation and their God, so led away by the Egyptians, that he would dare to defy the wishes and commands of his own father?

Was he, on whom he had set the highest hopes, a deserter and lost to his own people?

To these questions he might have no answer in words; but when Hosea took his horny old hand between his own and shook it as that of a friend, when he bade him farewell, his eyes glistening with

moisture, and murmured, "You shall hear of me!" he felt that this was enough, and overcome by vehement joy he kissed the soldier's arm and clothing again and again.

CHAPTER VII.

Hosea returned to his tent with a bowed head. The discord in his soul was resolved. He knew now what burden he must take up. His father called him and he must obey.

And the God of his people! As he listened to the old man's tale, all he had heard of that God in his childhood reawakened in his soul, and he knew now that He was another than Set, the God of the Asiatics in Lower Egypt; and another than the "One," the "Sum of All," of the Adepts. The prayer he had been wont to say on going to rest, the story of the Creation which he had never been weary of hearing, because it so plainly showed how everything which existed in heaven and on earth had gradually come into being till man came to take possession of it and to enjoy it all; the history of his Father Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob, Esau and his own forefather Joseph—how gladly had he hearkened to all this as it was told him by the

gentle mother who had borne him, by his nurse and his grandfather, Elishama; and yet he seemed long since to have forgotten it. But under the old slave's humble roof he could have repeated the tale word for word, and he now knew of a surety that there was indeed one God, Invisible, Almighty, who had chosen Israel to be His own people and had promised to make them a great nation. That which the Egyptian priesthood kept secret as the greatest mystery was the common possession of His people; every beggar, every slave might lift his hands in prayer to the one invisible God who had revealed Himself to Abraham and promised him great things. Over-wise heads among the Egyptians, who had divined His existence and overlaid His essence with the monstrous births of their own imaginings and their own thoughts, had shrouded Him in a thick veil and hidden Him from the multitude. It was only among His chosen people that He lived and showed forth His power in its mighty and awful greatness.

This God was not nature, though the initiated in the temples confounded them: no, the God of his fathers was enthroned on high, above all created things and the visible universe, above man, His last and most perfect work, created in His own image;

and all creatures were subject to His will. He, the King of Kings, ruled all that had life with just severity; and although He hid Himself from the sight of man who was His image, and was beyond man's apprehension, yet was He a living, thinking and active Being, even as men were, save that His term of life was eternity, His mind was omniscience, His realm was infinity.

And this God had instituted Himself the leader of His people. There was no captain who could dare to defy His power. If Miriam were not deceived by the spirit of prophecy, and if He had indeed called Hosea to be His sword, how could he resist, or what higher place could he fill on earth?

And his people? The rabble crowd of whom he had thought with scorn, how transfigured they seemed by the power of the Most High now that he had heard old Eliab's tale! Now he only longed to lead them; and on his way back to the camp he stayed his steps on a sandy knoll from whence he could see the limitless waters gleaming under the light of the lamps of heaven, and for the first time for many long years, uplifted his arms and eyes to the God whom he had found again.

He began with a simple prayer which his mother had taught him; but then he cried to the Lord as a mighty counsellor, and besought Him with fervent entreaty to show him the way in which he should walk without being disobedient to his father, or breaking the oath he had sworn to the King, or becoming a traitor in the eyes of those to whom he owed so much.

"Thy people glorify Thee as the God of truth, punishing those who break their oath!" he cried. "How canst Thou bid me to be faithless, and to be false to the pledge I have given? All I am or can do is Thine, O Lord; and I am ready to give my blood and my life for my brethren. But rather than cast me into dishonour and perjury let me die and give the task thou hast chosen me, Thy servant, to do, to a free man bound by no oath."

Thus he prayed, and he felt as though he clasped in his arms a friend whom he had accounted as lost. Then he walked on in silence through the diminishing darkness, and as the gray dawn stole up, the high tide of passion ebbed in his soul, and the clear-headed warrior could think calmly.

He had vowed to do nothing against the will of his father or his God, but he was no less resolved

never to be a traitor and oathbreaker. What he had to do he now saw plainly and clearly. He must quit Pharaoh's service, and declare before the face of his superiors that as a dutiful son he must obey the commands of his father and go forth to share his fortunes and the fortunes of his people.

But he did not conceal from himself that his demand might be refused, that he might be kept back by force—perhaps, if he persisted unmoved in his resolve, be threatened with death, or, if it came to the worst, be handed over to the executioner. But even if this should be his doom, if his deed cost him his life, he would* have done what was right, and his comrades in arms, whose esteem was dear to him, would still think of him as their worthy mate; his father and Miriam would not be wroth with him; nay, but would mourn for the faithful son, the true man who preferred death to treason.

Calm and elevated in spirit, he gave the watchword to the sentry with proud composure, and went into his tent.

Ephraim still lay sleeping, and smiling as though wrapped in sweet dreams. Hosea lay down on a mat near him to seek strength for the hard day before him. His eyes soon closed, and after sleeping

an hour he awoke of his own accord and called for his handsomest raiment, his helmet and gilt armour which he was wont to wear only at high festivals or in the King's presence.

Meanwhile Ephraim, too, awoke, gazed at his uncle from head to foot with delighted curiosity as he stood before him in stalwart manliness, and shining, warlike splendor, and cried as he started up:

"It must be a fine thing to be dressed like that and feel oneself to be the leader of thousands!"

The elder man shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Obey the Lord thy God, and give no man, whether great or small, the right to regard you with anything but respect, and then you may carry your head as high as the proudest hero in his purple robe and gilt breastplate."

"But you have done great things among the Egyptians," the lad went on; "they hold you in high esteem; even Hornecht, the great captain, and his daughter Kasana."

"Do they?" said the warrior with a smile, and he bid his nephew to lie down and keep quiet, for his brow, though less seriously burning than it had been the night before, was still very hot.

"Do not go out of doors," Hosea added, "till the leech has been to see you, and await my return."

"And will you be long away?" asked the boy.

At this Hosea paused in thought, looked kindly in his face, and then gravely replied:

"The man who serves a master never knows how long he may be detained." Then, changing his tone, he added less emphatically: "To-day, this morning, I may perhaps get through my business quickly and return in a few hours. If it should not be so, if I should not be with you by this evening, or early to-morrow morning, then"—and he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder—"then make your way home as fast as you can. If, when you reach Succoth, the people have gone on before you, look in the hollow sycamore before the house of Aminadab, and you will find a letter which will tell you whither they have gone: and when you come up with them greet my father and my grandfather Elishama, and likewise Miriam, and tell them and all the people that Joshua will ever be mindful of the commands of God and of his father. Henceforth he will be called Joshua by all men—Joshua, and not Hosea. Tell this to Miriam first of all.

"Finally, say to them that if I stay behind, if I am not allowed to follow them, as I fain would do,

it is that the Most High hath dealt otherwise with me, and hath broken the sword which He had chosen before he had used it. Do you understand me, boy?"

And Ephraim bowed his head and said: "You mean that death alone can keep you from obeying the call of God and your father's commands?"

"That was my meaning," replied his uncle. "And if they ask you why I have not stolen away from Pharaoh and escaped from his power, answer that Hosea would fain enter on his office as a true man unstained by perjury, or, if it be God's will, die true. Now rehearse the message."

Ephraim obeyed; and his uncle's words must have sunk deep into his soul, for he neither forgot nor altered a single word; but he had no sooner ended his task of repetition than he seized Hosea's hand with vehement urgency and implored him to tell him whether he had indeed any fear for his life.

At this the warrior clasped him in a loving embrace, and assured him that he hoped that he had given him this message only to be forgotten.

"Perhaps," he added, "they may try to keep me by force, but by God's help I shall soon be back with you again, and we will ride forth together to Succoth."

· He turned and went out without heeding his nephew's questions, for he heard the sound of wheels without, and two chariots with fine horses came rapidly up to the tent and stopped in front of the entrance.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOSEA was well acquainted with the men who stepped out of the chariots; they were the head chamberlain and one of the King's chief scribes, and they had come to bid him to the "High Gate," as the palace of the Pharaohs was called. No hesitancy or escape was possible, and he got into the second chariot with the scribe, surprised indeed, but not uneasy. Both officials wore mourning robes, and instead of a white ostrich plume, the insignia of office, a black plume fixed on the brow. The horses, too, and the runners were decked with badges of the deepest woe. And yet the King's messengers seemed to be cheerful rather than dejected, for the noble bird which they were charged to bring into Pharaoh's presence had come out at their call, and they had feared to find the nest deserted.

The long-limbed bays of royal breed carried the light vehicles with the swiftness of the wind across the uneven sandy way and the smooth high road beyond, toward the palace.

Ephraim, with youthful inquisitiveness, had gone out of the tent to see the unwonted scene that met his eyes. The soldiers were well pleased that Pharaoh should have sent his own chariots to fetch their captain, and he even felt his vanity flattered when he saw his uncle drive away. But he had not long the pleasure of watching him, for thick clouds of dust soon hid the chariots from view. The hot desert wind had risen which so often blows in the Nile valley during the spring months, and whereas all night and in the morning the sky had been clearly blue, it was now not clouded, but veiled, as it were with white haze.

The sun looked down, a motionless globe, like a blind eye above the heads of men, and the fierce heat it shed seemed to have burned up its beams, which to-day were invisible. The eye, protected by the mist, could look up at it unhurt, and yet its scorching power was as great as ever. The light breeze which commonly fanned the brow in the early part of the day touched it now like the hot breath of a raging beast of prey. It was loaded with the fine scorching sand of the desert, and the pleasure of breathing was turned into torture. The usually fragrant air of a March day in Egypt was now an oppression both to man and beast, choking

their lungs, and seeming, indeed, to weigh on the whole frame and check its joy in life.

The higher the pale and rayless orb rose in the sky the denser grew the mist, the heavier and swifter rolled the sand-clouds from the desert.

Ephraim still stood in front of the tent gazing at the spot where Pharaoh's chariots had vanished in the dust. His knees shook, but he attributed this to the wind sent by Set-Typhon, at whose blowing even the strongest was aware of a weight about his feet.

Hosea was gone, but he might return in a few hours, and then he would be compelled to follow him to Succoth; then the fair dreams and hopes which yesterday had brought him, and whose bewitching charms his fever had enhanced, would be lost to him forever.

In the course of the night he had quite made up his mind to enter Pharaoh's army, to the end that he might remain near Tanis and Kasana; but, although he had not more than half understood Hosea's message, he could clearly infer that he meant to turn his back on Egypt and his high office, and that he counted on taking him, Ephraim, with him, unless meanwhile he could make good his escape. So then he must give up his desire to see

Kasana once more. But this thought was more than he could endure, and a voice within whispered to him that he had neither father nor mother and was free to act as he chose. His guardian, the brother of his deceased father, in whose house he had been brought up, had died not long since of an illness, and no new guardian had been appointed to him, as he was now past childhood. He was destined by and by to become one of the chiefs of his proud tribe, and until yesterday had never wished for anything better.

When yesterday he had rejected the priest's challenge to become a warrior under Pharaoh, with the pride of a shepherd prince, he had followed the impulse of his heart; but now he said to himself that he had been foolish and childish to reject a thing of which he knew nothing, which had always and intentionally been represented to him in a false and hideous light in order to attach him more closely to his own people. The Egyptians, he had always been told, were his enemies and oppressors, and how delightful, on the contrary, had everything seemed in the first house of an Egyptian warrior which he had happened to enter.

And Kasana! What would she think of him if he quitted Tanis without a word of greeting or

leave-taking? Would it not be a perpetual vexation and regret to him that he must dwell in her memory as a clumsy peasant shepherd? Indeed, it would be actually dishonest not to restore the costly garments which she had lent him. Gratitude was accounted among the Hebrews, too, as the holiest duty of a noble heart. He would be a hateful wretch all his life long if he did not go to see her once more.

Only he must make haste, for when his uncle should return he must find him ready to set out.

He began forthwith to strap the sandals on his feet; but he did it but slowly, and he could not understand what it was that made everything so difficult to him to-day.

He crossed the camp unimpeded. The Pylons and obelisks in front of the temples showed him the way, though they seemed to quiver in the sand-filled air, and he presently came out on the broad road which led to the town market-place. A panting Egyptian, whose ass was carrying wine-skins to the camp, directed him on his way.

The path was deep in dust, and dust wrapped him as he went. The sun overhead poured a flood of fire down on his bare head, and his wound again began to ache, the sand filled his eyes and mouth

and stung his face and bare limbs. He was overpowered by thirst, and more than once he was forced to stop, for his feet felt strangely heavy. At last he reached a well, dug for wayfarers by a pious Egyptian, and although it was graced with the image of a god, and Miriam had taught him that it was an abomination to turn from the way to such images, he drank nevertheless, and drank again, and thought he had never enjoyed such a refreshing draught.

He got over his fear of losing his senses, as he had done yesterday, and, though his feet still dragged, he walked on briskly to the tempting goal. But presently his strength again failed him, the sweat streamed from his brow, and there was a throbbing and hammering in the cut on his head and he felt as if his skull was being crushed in an iron fillet. Now his usually keen sight was failing, for the things he tried to see seemed to float in dancing sand, the horizon rocked before his eyes; and suddenly he felt as though the hard pavement had turned to a bog beneath his feet. Still all this troubled him little, for his fancy had never glowed so brightly within him. The things he thought of rose before him with marvellous vividness. Image after image stood before the wide-open eyes of his soul, and not at his bidding, but as if raised by a

will outside himself. Now he beheld himself lying at Kasana's feet, his head fondly laid on her lap while he gazed up into her lovely face. Then it was Hosea who stood before him, in splendid armour as he had just now seen him, only more gorgeous; and in ruddy firelight, instead of the dim light in the tent. Then again, all the finest oxen and rams of his herds passed in front of him, and mingling with all these, sentences of the message he had learned passed through his mind—nay, he fancied that they were being shouted in his ears; but before he could be quite sure of their meaning, some new and dazzling vision or a loud, rushing sound filled his mind's eye and ear.

And on he went, tottering like one drunk, with the sweat standing on his brow and a parched mouth. Now and then he mechanically lifted his hand to wipe the dust from his burning eyes, but he cared little that they failed to show him clearly what was passing around him, for nothing could be more delightful than what he beheld when he looked within. Every now and then, to be sure, he was conscious of acute suffering, and he felt inclined to fling himself on the ground in sheer exhaustion, but then again a strange sense of relief kept him up. At last the delirium was too much for him; his head

seemed growing and swelling till it was as large as the head of the colossus he had seen yesterday in front of a temple, then it rose to the height of the palm trees by the roadside, and at last it reached the mist over the firmament, and higher and higher yet. Then this head, which was still his head, was as wide as the horizon, and he pressed his hands to his temples and held his brow, for his neck and shoulders were too weak to bear the burden of so huge a head, and possessed with this madness, he shrieked aloud, his knees gave way and he sank senseless in the dust.

• CHAPTER IX.

AT this same hour a chamberlain was leading Hosea into the hall of audience.

Though subjects bidden to attend the King commonly had hours to wait, the Hebrew's patience was put to no severe test. At this time of deep mourning the spacious rooms of the palace, in which a gay and noisy throng were wont to move, were as still as the grave, for not the slaves and sentries only, but many persons of superior rank in immediate attendance on the royal pair, had fled from the pestilence and escaped without leave.

Here and there a solitary priest or official leaned against a pillar or cowered on the ground, hiding his face in his hands, while awaiting some command. Soldiers went about trailing their arms and in silent brooding. Now and then a few young priests in mourning robes stole through the deserted rooms and speechlessly swung the silver censers, which shed a pungent perfume of resin and juniper.

It was as though a terrible incubus weighed on

the palace and its inhabitants, for, added to the loss of the King's beloved son, which came home to many hearts, the fear of death and the desert wind had crushed the energies of mind and body alike.

Here, under the shadow of the throne, where of yore all eyes had glittered with hope, ambition, gratitude or fear, devotion or hatred, Hosea saw to-day only bowed heads and downcast looks.

Baie alone, the second prophet of Amon, seemed untouched by sorrow or the terrors of the night and the enervating influences of the day, for he greeted the captain in the ante-chamber as frankly and cheerfully as ever, and assured him, though in an undertone, that no one dreamed of calling him to account for the sins of his people. But when the Hebrew, of his own free will, acknowledged that at the moment when he was sent for by the King he was in the act of going to the superior captains of the army to beseech them to release him from his service, the priest interrupted him to remind him of the debt of gratitude which he, Baie, owed to him. And he declared that for his part, he would do his utmost to keep him with the army and to prove to him that an Egyptian knew how to honour faithful service without respect of persons or considerations

of birth, nay, even against Pharaoh's will; and of this he would presently speak with him in secret.

But the Hebrew had no time to reiterate his purpose, for the head chamberlain interrupted them to lead Hosea into the presence of the "Kind God."*

Pharaoh awaited him in the smaller reception hall, adjoining the royal apartments. It was a noble room, and looked more spacious to-day than when, as usual, it was filled with a crowd. Only a few courtiers and priests, with some of the Queen's ladies, formed a small group, all in deep mourning, round the throne; opposite the King, squatting in a circle on the ground, were the King's councillors and interpreters, wearing each his ostrich plume.

All wore badges of mourning, and the monotonous chant of the wailing women, broken now and then by a loud, shrill, tremulous outcry, came pealing out from the inner rooms and found its way to the great hall, a token that death had claimed a victim even in the palace.

The King and Queen sat on a couch under a canopy of black; the throne itself was of ivory and gold. Instead of their splendid state attire they were clad in dark robes, and the royal wife and

* An euphemistic title of the Pharaohs.

mother, who bewailed her first-born, leaned motionless and with downcast head against her husband's shoulder.

Pharaoh, too, kept his eyes fixed on the ground, as if lost in a dream. The sceptre had fallen from his hand and lay in his lap.

The Queen had been torn from the corpse of her son, which was now given over to the embalmers, and it was not till she entered the audience hall that she had been able to control her tears. But she had not thought of resistance, for the unrelenting ceremonial of court life made the Queen's presence indispensable at any audience of high importance. And to-day of all days she certainly would fain have escaped, but that Pharaoh had commanded her to appear. She knew what counsel was to be taken and approved of it beforehand, for she was wholly possessed by her dread of the power of Mesu, the Hebrew, called by his own people Moses, and of his God, who had brought such terrors on Egypt. Alas! for she had other children to lose, and she had known Mesu from his childhood, and knew in what high esteem the learning of this stranger had been held by the great Rameses, her husband's father and predecessor, who had brought him up with his own sons.

Oh, if it were but possible to make terms with this man! But Mesu had departed with his people, and she knew his iron will, and that the terrible foe was armed not alone against Pharaoh's threats but even against her passionate supplications.

Now she would meet Hosea, and he, the son of Nun and the most noble of the Hebrews of Tanis, could succeed, if any man could, in carrying out such measures as she and her husband might think best for all parties, in concert with Ruie, the venerable high priest and chief prophet of Amon, the pontiff of all the priesthood of Egypt, who combined in his own person the dignities of chief judge, treasurer and viceroy of the realm, and who had come with the court from Thebes to Tanis.

When she had been sent for to the audience chamber she was winding a garland for the beloved dead, and lotos flowers, larkspurs, mallow and willow leaves were handed to her as she required them. They lay before her now on a table and in her lap, but she felt paralyzed, and her hand, as she put it forth, refused its service.

Ruie, the chief prophet of Amon, sat on his heels on a mat to the left of the King; he was a very old man, long past his ninetieth year. A pair of shrewd eyes, shaded by a pent house of thick white

eyebrows, looked out of his brown face, which was as gnarled and wrinkled as the bark of a rugged oak, like bright flowers from withered foliage; and their brilliancy was startling in such a shrunken, huddled, stooping figure. *

This old man had long since left all active conduct of affairs to the second prophet, Baie, but he clung stoutly to his dignities, to his place at Pharaoh's side and his seat in the council; and, rarely as he spoke, his opinion more often carried the day than that of the eloquent, fiery, and much younger second prophet.

Since the pestilence had invaded the palace the old man had not quitted Pharaoh's side; yet he felt more alive than usual to-day, for the desert wind, which made others languish, revived him. He was wont to shiver continually in spite of the panther skin which covered his back and shoulders, and the heat of the day warmed his sluggish old blood.

The Hebrew Mesu had been his pupil, and never had he had the guidance of a grander nature or the teaching of a youth more richly graced with all the gifts of the spirit. He had initiated the Hebrew into all the highest mysteries, and had expected the greatest results for Egypt and the priesthood; and when Mesu had one day slain an over-

seer who was unmercifully flogging one of his fellow Hebrews, and had fled into the desert, Ruie had bewailed the rash deed as deeply as if his own son had committed it and was to suffer the consequences. His intercession had procured Mesu's pardon, but when Mesu had returned to Egypt, and that change had been wrought in him which his friends in the temple called his apostasy, he had caused his old master a keener grief than by his flight. If Ruie had been younger he would have hated the man who had cheated his dearest hopes; but the old priest, to whom the human heart was as an open book, and whose sober impartiality enabled him to put himself in the place of his fellow man, confessed to himself that it was his own fault that he had failed to foresee this falling away. Education and dogma had made of Mesu, the Hebrew, an Egyptian priest after his own heart and pleasing to the divinity, but when once he had raised his hand to defend one of his own race against those to whom he had been allied only by human agencies, he was lost to the Egyptians. He was henceforth a true son of his people, and whithersoever this high-minded and strong-willed man might lead, others must inevitably follow.

Aye, and the high priest knew full well what

it was that the apostate hoped to give to his people; he had confessed to Ruie himself that it was the faith in one God. Mesu had denied that he was guilty of perjury, and had pledged himself never to betray the mysteries to his people, but only to lead them back to the God whom their forefathers had served before Joseph and his kindred had ever come into Egypt. The one god of the initiated was, no doubt, in many respects like the God of the Hebrews, and that was precisely what had reassured the ancient sage; for he knew by experience that the common folk would not be content with a god, one and invisible, such as many even of the more advanced of his own disciples found it difficult to conceive of. The men and women of the masses required sensible images of everything of which they perceived the effects in and about them, and this need the religion of the Egyptians gratified. What comfort could a love-lorn maid find in an invisible and creative Power, governing the course of the universe? She would be drawn to the gentle Hathor, who held in her beneficent grasp the cords which bind heart to heart, the fair and powerful goddess of procreation, before whom she could pour forth in full confidence all that weighed on her soul. Or a mother who longed to snatch a darling child from death—how

could her small sorrows concern the incomprehensible and almighty Being who ruled the whole world? But Isis, the gracious mother, who herself had wept in such deep anguish, she could understand her grief! And how often in Egypt it was the wife who influenced her husband's attitude to the gods!

And the high priest had frequently seen Hebrew men and women worshipping devoutly in the sanctuaries of Egypt. Even if Mesu should succeed in persuading them to acknowledge one God, he, the experienced old man, foresaw with certainty that they would ere long turn away from the invisible Spirit who must ever remain remote and unreal to their apprehension, and flock back in hundreds to the gods they could understand.

Now Egypt was threatened with the loss of the tilers and brickmakers she so greatly needed. Still Ruie believed he could lure them back.

"When kind words will do the work let sword and bow lie idle," he had said to his deputy, Baie, who had urged that the fugitives should be pursued and slain. "We have more corpses than enough already; what we lack are workers. Let us try to keep our hold on what we are so likely to lose."

And this milder counsel had been quite after the heart of Pharaoh, who had had enough of lamentation, and who would have thought it less rash to go unarmed into a lion's cage than to defy the terrible Hebrew any further.

So he had turned a deaf ear to the incitements of the second prophet, whose decisive and energetic nature had an influence all the more powerful as his own was irresolute, and had approved old Ruie's proposal that Hosea, the man of war, should be sent to his people to treat with them in Pharaoh's name—a plan which had calmed his fears and inspired him with new hopes.

Baie himself had at last agreed to this suggestion. It gave him a further chance of undermining the throne he hoped to overthrow, and if once the Hebrews were re-established in the land, Prince Siptah, in whose eyes no punishment was too severe for the Hebrews, who hated him, might very probably seize the sceptre of the cowardly Menephtah. But first the fugitives must be stopped, and for this Hosea was the right man. No one, Baie thought, was better fitted to win the confidence of an unsuspecting soldier than Pharaoh himself and his royal wife.

The old high priest was on this point of the same opinion, although he had nothing to do with the conspiracy; and thus the sovereigns had determined to interrupt the lamentations for the dead, and themselves speak with the Hebrew.

Hosea fell on his face before their feet, and when he rose the King's weary countenance was bent on him, sadly indeed, but graciously.

The father who had lost his first-born son had, according to custom, sacrificed his hair and beard to the razor. They had formerly framed his face in glossy black, but near twenty years of anxious rule had turned them gray, and his figure had lost its upright bearing and had a languid, senile stoop, though he was scarcely past fifty. His regular features were still handsome and there was something pathetic in their melancholy softness, evidently incapable of any severe tension, especially when a smile lent bewitching charm to his mouth. The indolent deliberateness of his movements scarcely detracted from the natural dignity of his person, though his voice, which was agreeable, generally had an exhausted and plaintive sound. He was not born to rule; thirteen brothers, older than he, had died before the heirship to the throne had devolved upon him, and he, meanwhile, as the handsomest

youth in all the land, the darling of the women and a light-hearted favourite of fortune, had lived a life of unbroken enjoyment till he had almost arrived at manhood. Then he had succeeded his father, Rameses the Great; and hardly had he grasped the sceptre when the Libyans, with strong allies, had rebelled against his rule. The veteran troops and their captains, schooled in his father's wars, helped him to conquer. But in the twenty years which had now elapsed since his father's death his armies had rarely had any rest, for rebellions had constantly to be quelled, now in the East and now in the West, and instead of dwelling in Thebes, where he had spent many happy years, and living in the most gorgeous of palaces, as he would fain have done, enjoying the blessings of peace and the society of the illustrious students and poets who were at that time to be found there, he was forced sometimes to lead his armies into the field and sometimes to reside at Tanis. Thus only could he settle the difficulties that disturbed the border province, and in this he yielded willingly to the counsels of Ruie. In the later years of his father's reign the national sanctuary at Thebes, and, consequently, its high priest, had attained greater wealth and power than the royal family, and it suited Menephta's indolent

nature to be an instrument rather than a master, so long as he abdicated none of the external honours due to the Pharaoh. These he guarded with a resolute care which he was incapable of exerting when more serious matters demanded it.

The gracious condescension with which the King received him gratified Hosea, and at the same time roused his suspicions. However, he had the courage to declare freely that he desired to be released from his office and from the oath he had taken to his sovereign lord.

Pharaoh listened unmoved, and it was not till the soldier had confessed that his father's commands had prompted him to take this step that Pharaoh signed to the high priest, who then spoke in scarcely audible tones:

"A son who sacrifices greatness that he may continue dutiful to his father must be one of the most faithful of Pharaoh's servants. Go, then, do the bidding of Nun. The Child of the Sun, the lord of Upper and Lower Egypt, sets you free. But on one condition, which, I as the minister of the Master, declare to you."

"And what is that?" inquired Hosea.

And again the King signed to the old priest;

then he sank back on the throne, while Ruie fixed his piercing eyes on Hosea and went on:

“That which the Lord of both worlds requires of you by my mouth is easy to fulfill. You must return, to be his servant and one of us again, as soon as your people and their chief, who brought such woe on this land, shall have taken the hand of the divine son of the Sun which he vouchsafes to hold forth to them in pardon, and shall have come back under the shadow of his throne. He, of his divine mercy, is ready to attach them to him and to his land again with rich gifts, as soon as they come home from the desert, whither they are gone forth to sacrifice to their god. Mark me well! All the oppressions which weighed on the people to whom you belong shall be lifted from them. The divine King will make a new law granting them much freedom and many privileges, and all that we promise them shall be written down and witnessed on our part and on yours, as a new covenant binding on our children and our children’s children. Now when this shall have been done, with an honest purpose to abide by it forever on our part, and when your people shall have agreed to accept it, will you then consent to be one of us once more?”

"Take upon yourself the office of mediator," the Queen here broke in, in a low voice, and her sad eyes were fixed beseechingly on the Hebrew's face. "I quail before Mesu's wrath, and all that may be done shall be done to win back his former friendship. Speak to him in my name, and remind him of the days when I, Isisnefert, would learn of him the names of the plants I carried to him, and he taught me and my sister their uses or their poisonous powers when he came to see the Queen, his second mother, in the women's quarters. The wounds he has inflicted on our hearts shall be forgiven and forgotten. Be our ambassador, Hosea; do not refuse our prayer!"

"Such words from such gracious lips are a command," replied the warrior, "and are sweet to the heart. I will be mediator."

At this the old high priest nodded approval and said: "Then I hope that the fruit of this short hour may be a long period of peace. But mark me. Where medicine may avail we avoid the knife and cautery; where there is a bridge over the river a man does not rashly try to swim through the whirlpool."

"Yes, verily, we will avoid the whirlpool," said

the King, and the Queen repeated his words; then she again fixed her eyes on the flowers in her lap.

Then a formal council was held.

Three private scribes sat down 'on the ground, close to the high priest, to enable them to hear his low tones, and the interpreters and counsellors, in their places, took out their writing things, and, holding the papyrus in their left hands, wrote with reeds or brushes, for nothing might remain unrecorded which was discussed and decided in Pharaoh's presence. Hardly a whisper was to be heard in the hall while this went on, the guards and courtiers remained motionless in their places, and the royal couple sat rigid and speechless, gazing into vacancy, as if in a dream.

Neither Pharaoh nor his wife could possibly have caught a word of the murmured colloquy of the speakers, but the Egyptians never ended a sentence without glancing up at the King, as if to make sure of his approval. Hosea, who was accustomed to the scene, followed their example, speaking like the others in a subdued voice, and when presently the voice of the second prophet, or of the chief interpreter, sounded rather louder, Pharaoh raised

his head and repeated the high priest's last saying: "Where there is a bridge over the river a man does not try to swim the whirlpool," for this exactly expressed his wishes and the Queen's. No fighting! Peace with the Hebrews, and from the wrath of their terrible leader and of his god, without losing the thousand diligent hands of the fugitive tribes.

Thus matters proceeded, and when the muttering of the speakers and the scratching of the pens had gone on for fully an hour, the Queen was still sitting in the same attitude; but Pharaoh began to stir and raise his voice, for he knew that the second prophet hated the man whose blessing he received and whose hostility filled him with such dread, and he feared but he should be requiring some impossible conditions of the envoy.

Still, all he said was again a repetition of the counsel as to the bridge; but his inquiring glance at the chief interpreter moved that official to assure him that all was proceeding favourably. Hosea had merely demanded that the overseers, who kept guard over the men at work, should not, for the future, be watchmen of Libyan race, but Hebrews themselves, to be chosen by the elders of their people under the sanction of the Egyptian government.

At this Pharaoh cast his look of anxious en-

treaty at Baie and the other councillors. The second prophet only shrugged his shoulders regretfully, and, feigning to defer his own opinion to the divine wisdom of Pharaoh, conceded this point to Hosea. The god enthroned on earth acknowledged this submission with a grateful bow, for Baie's will had often crossed his; and then, when the herald or rehearser had read aloud all the clauses of the treaty, Hosea was required to take a solemn oath that he would in any case come back to Tanis and report how his people had received the King's advances.

But the cautious warrior, who was well aware of all the snares and traps with which the state was only too ready, took this oath most unwillingly and only when he had obtained a written pledge that whatever the issue, his freedom should be in no way interfered with as soon as he could give them his word that he had done his part to induce the leaders of his people to accept these terms.

At last Pharaoh held out his hand for the captain to kiss, and when he had also pressed to his lips the hem of the Queen's robe, Ruie signed to the monarch, who understood that the moment was come when he might withdraw. And he did so with good will and a sense of encouragement, for

he believed that he had acted for the best for his own welfare and that of his people.

A bright radiance lighted up his handsome, languid features, and when the Queen rose and saw him smile, content, she did the same. At the door the King drew a breath of relief, and turning to his wife he said: "If Hosea does his errand well we shall get across the bridge."

"And not swim the whirlpool," replied the Queen in the same tone.

"And if the Hebrew captain can pacify Mesu," Pharaoh went on, "and he persuades his people to remain in the land——"

"Then you must adopt this Hosea into the royal family. He is well favoured and of a lordly mien," his wife broke in.

But at this Pharaoh suddenly abandoned his stooping and indifferent attitude.

"Impossible!" he eagerly exclaimed. "A Hebrew! If we raise him to be one of the 'friends,' or a fan-bearer, that is the highest he can hope for. In such matters it is very difficult to avoid doing too much or too little."

As the royal couple went forward toward the private apartments the wailing of the mourners fell more loudly upon the ear. Tears started afresh to

the Queen's eyes, while Pharaoh continued to deliberate precisely what position in the court Hosea might be allowed to fill if he succeeded in his embassy.

CHAPTER X.

Hosea had now to hasten if he was to overtake the Hebrews in time, for the further they had got on their way the more difficult it might be to persuade Moses and the heads of the tribes to return and accept the terms offered them.

The events of this morning were to him so marvellous that he regarded the issue as a dispensation of the god he had found once more; also he remembered the name of Joshua, that is to say, "Holpen of the Lord," which had been laid upon him by Miriam's message, whereas he had hitherto been called Hosea. He was willing to bear it, although he felt it hard to deny the sovereign who had raised him to honour. Many of his fellow-warriors had assumed similar names, and his had proved itself nobly true. Never had the help of God been more clearly with him than it had been this day. He had gone into Pharaoh's palace in the expectation of losing his freedom or being handed over to the executioner as soon as he declared his

wish to follow his people; and how easily had the ties been severed which bound him to Egypt. And he had been charged with a task in his eyes so great and noble that he could not forbear believing that the God of his fathers had called him to fulfil it.

He loved Egypt. It was a glorious land. Where could his people find a fairer dwelling place? The conditions only under which they had dwelt there had been intolerable. Better days were now before them. The Hebrews were to be permitted to return to Goshen or to settle in the lake-land west of the Nile, a district whose fertility was well known to him. No one henceforth might compel them to serfdom, and if they laid their hands to labour for the state, Hebrews only were to be their task-masters, and not the hard and cruel stranger. That his people must remain subject to Pharaoh was a matter of course. Joseph, Ephraim and his sons, Joshua's forefathers, had called themselves so, and had been well content to be called Egyptians. If his embassy came to a good end the elders of the tribes were to be allowed to rule the domestic affairs of the people. Moses must be the chief ruler in the new settlement, in spite of the second prophet's objections; and he himself would be captain of the

united force which should defend its frontiers; and form fresh legions of those Hebrew mercenaries who had already proved their valour in many wars. Before he left the palace the second prophet had given him several mysterious hints which had remained unsolved, but from which he inferred that Baie was big with portentous schemes, and purposed to give him some important charge as soon as the conduct of the state should fall from the hands of old Ruie into his own; perhaps the chief captaincy of the whole army of mercenaries, a post at present held by a Syrian named Aarsu. This disturbed rather than gratified him; but on the other hand it was a great satisfaction to him to have made it a condition that the eastern frontier should, every third year, be thrown open to the Hebrews, that they might go forth to the desert to offer sacrifices to their God. On this Moses had insisted most strongly, and as the law now stood no one was permitted to cross the eastern limit line, which was fortified at all points, without the expressed consent of the authorities. This concession to their great leader's desire might perhaps gain his assent to a treaty so favourable to his people.

All through these transactions Hosea had felt keenly how far he had been cut off from his race; he could

sessed in war and peace, in peril and privation, so frankly showed their grief at parting. The tears rolled down the brown cheeks of many a man grown gray in battle as he shook hands with him for the last time. Many a bearded lip was pressed to the hem of his garment, or his feet, or the shining coat of the Libyan charger, which bore him through the ranks with arched neck and eager prancing, though firmly held in by his rider. His own eyes were moist for the first time since his mother's death, as shouts of honest regret and farewell wishes broke from the manly hearts of his troops, and echoed along the lines. Never had he felt so deeply as at this moment, how closely his heart was knit to these men, and how precious to him was his noble calling.

But the duty which lay before him was high and noble, too, and the God who had released him from his oath and made his way plain to obey his father's behest and yet be true and faithful, would perhaps lead him back to his comrades in arms, whose farewell he could fancy still rang in his ears when he was long since out of hearing.

Still, the full-glory of the work intrusted to him, the exalted frame of mind of a man who goes forth with a high moral purpose to fulfill a difficult task, the perfect bliss of a lover who flies with well-

grounded hopes to crown the purest and dearest wish of his heart, did not wholly possess him till he had left the town behind him, and was hastening, at a brisk trot, across the level plain dotted with palm groves and pools which lay to the southeast.

So long as he had kept his horse at a moderate pace along the streets of the town and about the harbour, his mind was so full of the immediate past and of anxiety for the missing youth, that he had paid small heed to the scene around him; the numerous vessels lying at anchor, the motley throng of ships' captains, merchants, sailors and porters of the most diverse races of Africa and Western Asia, who here sought their fortunes, or the officials, soldiers and supplicants who had followed the court from Thebes to Tanis.

And he had also failed to observe two men of higher rank, though one of them, Hornecht, the captain of the bowmen, had saluted him as he passed. They were standing back under the gateway of the temple of Set, for shelter from a cloud of dust blown along the road by the wind from the desert. And as the archer vainly endeavoured to attract the rider's attention, Baie, his companion, said to him: "It matters not; he will learn soon enough where his nephew has found refuge."

"By your command," replied the soldier. Then he went on eagerly with what he had been saying: "The lad looked like a lump of clay in the potters' shed when he was brought in."

"And no wonder," interrupted the priest. "He had been lying quite long enough in Set-Typhon's dust. But what did your steward want among the soldiers?"

"My Adon, whom I had sent out last evening, brought word that the poor lad was in a high fever, so Kasana packed up some wine and her nurse's balsam, and the old woman went with them to the camp."

"To the boy or to the captain?" asked the prophet, with a cunning smile.

"To the sick lad," replied the soldier, decisively, with an ominous frown. But he checked himself and went on, apologetically: "Her heart is as soft as wax, and the Hebrew boy—you saw him yesterday——"

"A handsome fellow — quite after a woman's heart," laughed the priest. "And stroking the nephew down cannot hurt the uncle."

"She can hardly have had that in her mind," said Hornecht sharply. "And the unembodied God

of the Hebrews, it would seem, is no less mindful of his own than the immortals you serve, for when he led Hotepoo to the spot the boy was very nigh unto death. And the old man would have ridden past him, for the dust had already——”

“As you said, turned him into a lump of potter’s clay. But what then?”

“Then the old man saw something golden gleam in the gray mass.”

“And for gold the stiffest back will bend.”

“Very true! So did my old man. The broad gold bracelet, glittering in the sun, saved the boy’s life once more.”

“And the best of it is that we have got him alive.”

“Yes. I, too, was glad to see him open his eyes again. He quickly got better and better, and the leech says he is like a young cat and nothing will kill him. But he is in a high fever and talks all sorts of nonsense in his ravings, which even my daughter’s old nurse, a woman from Ascalon, does not understand. But she believes she can distinguish Kasana’s name.”

“A woman once more at the bottom of the mischief.”

“Cease jesting, reverend father,” replied the

warrior, and he bit his lip. "A decent widow, and this downy-cheeked boy?"

"At his tender years," the priest went on, in the same tone, "full-blown roses tempt young beetles more than buds do, and in this case," he added, more gravely, "nothing could be more fortunate. We have Hosea's nephew in our net, and now it is your part not to let him escape the toils."

"You mean," cried the soldier, "that we are to keep him a prisoner?"

"As you say."

"But you esteem his uncle highly?"

"Certainly, but higher still the State."

"But this lad—"

"He is a most welcome hostage. Hosea's sword was an invaluable weapon, but if the hand that wields it is guided by the man whose power over greater men than he we know too well——"

"You mean Mesu, the Hebrew?"

"Hosea will wound us as deeply as heretofore our enemies."

"But I heard you yourself say that he was incapable of treachery."

"And I say so still; and he has proved my words this very day. It was simply to procure his release from the oath of fealty that he this day put

his head into the crocodile's jaws. But if Hosea is a lion, in Mesu he will find his tamer. That man is Egypt's arch foe, and my gall rises only to think of him."

"The cries of woe within these gates are enough to keep our hatred alive."

"And yet the feeble creature who fills the throne postpones revenge and sends forth a pacificator."

"With your consent, I believe?"

"Quite true," replied the priest, with a sardonic smile. "We have sent him forth to build a bridge! A bridge, forsooth! The dried-up wisdom of an ancient sage recommends it, and the notion is quite after the heart of that contemptible son of a great father, who, for his part, never shrunk from swimming the wildest whirlpool, especially when revenge was in view. Well, Hosea may try to build it. If the bridge over the torrent only brings him back to us, I will give him a warm and sincere welcome. But we, who alone have any spirit in Egypt, must make it our business to see that as soon as this one man has recrossed to our shore the piers shall give way under the tread of the leader of his nation."

"Yes, yes. But I fear that we should lose the captain if his people met the fate they deserve."

"It may seem so."

- "You are wiser than I."

"But, still, in this case you think I am mistaken."

"How could I make so bold!"

"As a member of the Council of War it is your duty to express your own opinion, and I regard it now as my part to show you whither the road leads along which you have come so far with bandaged eyes. Listen, then, and be guided by what I tell you when it is your turn to speak in the assembly. Ruie, the high priest, is very old."

"And you already exercise half his prerogatives."

"Would that he might soon lay down the rest of the burden! Not for my own sake, I love a contest,—but for the welfare of our country. It has become a deeply-rooted habit to accept all that age decides and rules as the language of wisdom; thus there are few among the councillors who do not adhere to the old man, and yet his statecraft, like himself, goes only on crutches. All that is good gets lost in a fog under his weak and half-hearted guidance."

"On this point you may count on my support," cried the warrior. "I will lend both hands to overthrow the dreamer on the throne and his senseless adviser."

At this the prophet laid his finger to his lip in

warning, went close up to his companion and said in low, rapid accents: "I am now expected at the palace, so hearken only to this much: If Hosea effects a reconciliation, his people, the guilty with the innocent, will all return, and the guilty will be punished. Among the innocent we may reckon the whole of the Captain's tribe, the tribe of Ephraim, from old Nun, the father, down to the boy in your house."

"They may be spared; but as Mesu is a Hebrew, whatever is done to him——"

"It will not be done in the open street; and there is never any difficulty about sowing the seeds of discord between two men who have an equal right to rule in their own circle. I will take care that Hosea shall wink at the death of the other, and then Pharaoh, whether his name be Menephtah or" (and here his voice fell to a murmur) "or Siptah, shall raise him to such a giddy height—for he deserves it—that his bewildered eye will never see anything we choose to hide from him. There is a dish of which no man can cease to eat who has once tasted it, and that meat we shall serve him withal."

"A dish—meat?"

"Power, Hornecht. Immense power, As governor

of a province, or Captain-general over all the mercenary troops in Aarsu's place, he will beware of quarrelling with us. I know him. If we can but make him believe that Mesu has done him a wrong—and that overbearing man will of a certainty give us some ground—and if he can but be convinced that the law prescribes such punishment as we may inflict on the magician and most of his followers, he will not merely consent, but approve."

"But if the embassy should fail?"

"Still he will come back to us; for he never would break an oath. But in the event of his being forcibly detained by Mesu, who is capable of anything, the boy will prove useful; for Hosea loves him, his people set great store by his life, and he is a son of one of their noblest families. Pharaoh shall at any rate threaten the lad; we, on our part, will protect him, and that will bind us more closely than ever to his uncle, and join him to those who are wroth with the King."

"Admirable!"

"And we shall yet more certainly gain our end if we can bind him by yet another tie,—and now I beseech you to be calm, for you are too fiery for your years. In short, our brother in arms, the man

who saved my life, the best warrior in all the army, and who consequently must rise to the highest honours, must be your daughter's husband. Kasana loves the Hebrew—that I know from my wife."

The frown once more knit the archer's brow, and he struggled painfully to be calm. He felt that he must subdue his distaste for calling this man his son-in-law; for in fact he liked and esteemed him, though he was averse to his nationality. He could not, indeed, refrain from muttering a curse, but his reply to the priest was calmer and more reasonable than Baie had expected. If Kasana was so possessed by demons as to be drawn to this stranger, then she should have her way. But Hosea as yet had not wooed her, "and," he added furiously, "by the red god Set and his seventy fellows! neither you nor any other man shall ever move me to force my child, who has suitors by the score, on a man who, though he calls himself our friend, has never yet found leisure to greet us in our own house! Taking charge of the lad is another matter, and I will see that he does not escape."

"Very good, my friend," replied the priest, laying his hand on his companion's shoulder. "You know how highly I value Hosea, and if he should

become your son-in-law he will be the most important and indispensable of all our colleagues, and then I fancy his nephew may grow up to be a valiant officer in our army."

CHAPTER XI.

THE midnight sky, sown with innumerable stars, spread deeply and purely blue over the broad level of the eastern delta and the town of Succoth, which the Egyptians called, from its presiding deity, Pithom, or the city of Toom. The March night was drawing to its close. White mists floated above the canal, a work of the Hebrew bondsmen, which intersected the plain and watered the pasture land and meadows that spread on all sides as far as the eye could reach. To the east and south the horizon was shrouded by the thick haze which rose from the broad lakes by the isthmus. The hot, sandy desert wind which yesterday had blown over the thirsty grass, the barren border-land to the east, and the houses and tents of Succoth, had died away during the night, and the chill hour which in March precedes sunrise, even in Egypt, was very perceptible.

Any one who had in former days arrived between midnight and dawn at the humble frontier

town with its squalid hovels of Nile mud and modest farms and dwellings, could not have recognized it now. Even its one important building, besides the splendid temple of the god Toom, the spacious and fortified storehouse, presented a strange spectacle. The long, white, lime-washed walls gleamed as usual through the dusk; but it no longer towered in death-like silence over the sleeping town; all about it was stir and bustle. It did duty as a fortress against the plundering tribes of Shasoos* who had made their way round the outworks on the isthmus, and an Egyptian garrison dwelt within its indestructible walls, which could easily be held against very superior numbers.

This morning it might have been supposed that the sons of the desert had taken it by storm, but the men and women who were so busy round the walls and on the broad marble parapet of the huge building were not Shasoos, but Hebrews. With shouts and demonstrations of joy they were taking possession of the thousands of measures of wheat and barley, rye and doorah, lentils, dates and onions which they had found in those vast lofts, and had

* Bedouins, whose nomad hordes swarmed in the desert adjoining Egypt on the east, now regarded as belonging to Asia.

set to work before sunrise to empty the storehouse and pack the contents into sacks and pitchers and skins, into kneading-troughs, jars and sheets, let down from the roof by cords or carried up and down on ladders.

The chiefs of the tribes, indeed, took no part in the work, but in spite of the early hour children of all ages might be seen, as busy as the rest, carrying as much as they could lift in pots and bowls—their mothers' cooking vessels.

Above, close to the opened trapdoors of the lofts, into which the stars shone down, and round the foot of the ladders below, women held lanterns or torches to light the others at their work. Flaring pitch brands were burning in front of the ponderous closed doors, and armed shepherds were pacing up and down in the light of the blaze. When, now and again, there was a sound within as of a stone thrown, or a kick against the brass-bound door, and threatening words in the Egyptian tongue, the Hebrews outside were ready enough with shouts of mockery and scorn.

On the day of the harvest-festival, at the hour of the first evening watch, certain swift runners had come to Succoth and had announced to the sons of

Israel who dwelt there, and whose numbers were twentyfold as great as those of the Egyptians, that they had started from Tanis early that morning, that their people were to depart thence that night, and that their kindred of Succoth were to make ready to fly with them. At this there had been great rejoicing among the Hebrews. They, like their fellow-Israelites of Tanis, had assembled together that night of the new moon after the spring equinox, when the harvest-festival began, to a solemn feast, and the heads of their households had declared to them that the day of freedom was now at hand, and that the Lord was about to lead them forth to the promised land.

Here, as at Tanis, many had been faint-hearted and rebellious, and others had attempted to separate their lot from that of the rest and so remain behind; but here, too, they had been carried away by the multitude. And as Aaron and Nun had addressed the people at Tanis, so here Eleazar the son of Aaron, and Hur and Nahshon, the heads of the tribe of Judah, had done the same. And Miriam, the maiden sister of Moses, had gone from house to house, and with her glowing words had lighted and fanned the flames of enthusiasm in the hearts of the men, and persuaded the women that, with the

morning's sun, a day of gladness, plenty and freedom would dawn on them and on their children.

Few had turned a deaf ear to the prophetess, and there was something majestic and commanding in the presence of this maiden, whose large, black eyes, overarched by thick, dark eyebrows which met in the middle, seemed to read the hearts of those they gazed on, and to awe the refractory with their solemn gleam.

When the feast was over each household had retired to rest with hopeful and uplifted hearts. But the next day and the following night and dawn had changed everything. It was as though the desert wind had buried all courage and confidence in the sand it swept before it. The dread of wandering through the unknown had crept again into every soul, and many a one who had brandished his staff with the high spirit of enterprise now clung obstinately to the house of his fathers, to his well-tended garden plot, and to the harvest in the fields, of which not more than half was yet garnered.

The Egyptian garrison in the fortified storehouse had not indeed failed to observe that some unusual excitement prevailed among the Hebrews, but they had ascribed it to the harvest-feast. The com-

mander of the fort had heard that Moses desired to lead his people forth into the desert, there to sacrifice to their God, and he had asked for re-inforcements. But he knew nothing more, for till the morning when the hot wind had arisen no Hebrew had betrayed his brethren's purpose. On that day, however, as the heat oppressed them more and more, the greater grew the dread of the terrified people of marching ever onward through the scorching, sandy and waterless waste. This fearful day was but a foretaste of what lay before them, and when toward mid-day the dust cloud was yet denser and the air more suffocating, a Hebrew dealer, from whom the Egyptian soldiers would purchase small wares, stole into the storehouse and instigated the captain to hinder his fellow-Hebrews from rushing to destruction.

Even among the better sort the voice of discontent had been loud; Izchar and Michael and their sons, who disliked the power of Moses and Aaron, had gone from one to another and tried to incite them to call the elders together again before they set forth, and ask them whether it would not be wiser to make terms with the Egyptians.

While these malcontents had succeeded in assembling many followers, and the traitor had gone

to the captain of the Egyptian garrison, two more runners had come in with a message to say that the multitude of the Hebrew fugitives would arrive at Succoth between midnight and dawn.

Breathless and speechless, bathed in sweat and bleeding at the mouth, the elder of the two messengers dropped on the threshold of the house of Aminadab, where Miriam just now was dwelling. The exhausted men had to be revived with wine and food before even the less weary one could speak coherently; and then in a husky voice, but overflowing with thankfulness and enthusiasm, he told all that had happened at their departing, and how that the God of their fathers had filled all hearts with his spirit, and infused fresh confidence into the most faint-hearted.

Miriam had listened with flashing eyes to this inspiring tale, and then, flinging her veil about her head, she bade the servants of the house, who had collected round the runners, to gather all the people together under the sycamore, whose broad boughs, the growth of a thousand years, sheltered a wide space from the scorching sun.

The hot wind was still blowing, but the glad tidings seemed to have broken its power over the

spirits of men, and thousands had come pouring out to assemble under the sycamore. Miriam gave her hand to Eleazar, the son of her brother Aaron, sprang on to the bench which stood close to the huge, hollow trunk of the tree, and in a loud voice prayed to the Lord, raising her hands and eyes to Heaven, as though in ecstasy her eyes beheld Him.

Then she bade the messenger speak, and when he had once more declared all that had befallen in Tanis, a loud cry went up from the multitude. Then Eleazar, the son of Aaron, described in glowing words all that the Lord had done for his people, and had promised to them and their children and their children's children.

Every word from the speaker's eager lips had fallen on the hearts of his hearers like the fresh dew of morning on parched grass. The believers had shouted greeting to him and to Miriam, and the faint-hearted had found new wings of hope. Izehar and Michael and their followers murmured no more; nay, most of them had caught the general enthusiasm; and when presently a Hebrew soldier of the garrison stole out from the storehouse and revealed to them that his chief had been informed of what was going forward, Eleazar, Nahshon, Hur and some others

had held a council with the shepherds present, and had urged them in fiery language to show now that they were men and not afraid to fight, with God's mighty help, for their nation and its freedom. There was no lack of axes, staves, sickles and brazen pikes, of heavy poles and slings, the shepherds' weapons against the beasts of the desert, though of bows and arrows they had none. A strong force of powerful herdsmen had collected round Hur, and they at once had marched upon the Egyptian overseers who were in authority over some hundreds of Hebrew bondsmen toiling at the earthworks.

With the cry, "They are coming! Down with the oppressors! The Lord our God is our Captain!" they threw themselves on the Libyan guard, scattered them abroad and released the Hebrew labourers and stone-hewers. The noble Nahshon had set the example of clasping one of the hapless serfs as a brother to his heart, and then the others embraced the men they had set free, and thus the shout: "They are coming! The Lord God of our fathers is our Captain!" rang out far and wide. When at last the handful of shepherds had swollen to a thousand, Hur had led them on to meet the Egyptian warriors, whose numbers were far inferior.

The garrison, indeed, was but a handful; the Hebrew host was now beyond counting.

The Egyptian archers had shot a flight of arrows, and the slings of the stalwart Hebrews had sent a shower of deadly pebbles among the foremost of the foe, when a trumpet-call was heard calling the party of soldiers back into the shelter of the scarped walls and stout doors. The Egyptian chief had judged the Hebrew force too great, and his first duty was to hold the fort till re-inforcements should arrive.

But Hur had not been content with this first victory. Success had fanned the courage of his followers as a fresh breeze fans a smouldering fire; whenever an Egyptian showed himself on the roof of the storehouse a smooth pebble hit him sharply from the sling of a shepherd marksman. By Nahshon's orders ladders were brought out. In an instant the besiegers were swarming up the building on all sides, and after a short and bloodless struggle the stores were in the hands of the Hebrews. The Egyptians could only keep possession of the adjoining stronghold.

Meanwhile the wind had fallen. The more furious of the released bondsmen had piled straw, timber and brushwood before the door of the little

fort into which the Egyptians had retired, and they could without difficulty have destroyed the foe to the last man by fire; but Hur, Nahshon and the other wiser heads among the Hebrews had not permitted the destruction of the victuals laid up in the great storehouse.

It had, indeed, been no easy matter to keep the younger men among the oppressed serfs from this deed of vengeance, but they all belonged to some family in the settlement; and as Hur's prohibition was supported by the commands of their parents, they were soon not merely pacified, but ready to help in distributing the contents of the granaries among the households, and in loading them into carts or on to beasts of burden, to be carried off by the fugitives.

All this took place by the flaming light of torches, and it soon had assumed the character of an orgie, for neither Nahshon nor Eleazar had been able to hinder the men and women from opening the wine skins and jars. However, they succeeded in saving the larger part of the precious booty for the time of need, and although there were, indeed, too many drunk, the strong juice of the grape and their glee at securing so much plunder moved the multitude to thankfulness. When at length Eleazar went among

them once more to speak to them of the Promised Land they were ready to listen to him with uplifted hearts, and joined in a hymn of praise started by Miriam.

As in Tanis the spirit of the Lord had fallen on the people in the hour of their departing, so now in Succoth. When some seventy men and women who had hidden themselves in the temple of Toom heard the song of triumph, they came forth and joined the rest, and packed up their possessions with as much glad hope and confidence in the God of their fathers as if they had never murmured at departing.

As the stars faded, joy and excitement increased. Men and women went out in troops on the road to Tanis to meet their brethren. Many a father led his youthful son by the hand, many a mother carried her infant on her arm; for there were kindred to greet in the coming multitude, and this day must bring some moments of solemn joy in which all who were near and dear must share, and which even the youngest child would remember when he himself had children and grandchildren.

None sought his bed in tent, hut or house, for every hand was needed to finish the work of packing. The crowd of toilers in the storehouse had

diminished, and most households were furnished with as much food as they could carry away.

In front of the tents and hovels men and women, ready to depart, were camping round hastily-lighted fires, and in the farm yards the cattle were being driven together, and such beasts and sheep as were unfit to march were at once slaughtered. Outside many of the houses men plied the axe and hammer, and the sound of sawing was heard, for litters and couches had to be hastily constructed for the sick and feeble. Here, again, chariots and wagons were still being loaded, and husbands had no small trouble with their wives; for it is always hard to forfeit a possession, be it great or small, and a woman's heart often clings more fondly to some worthless trifle than to the most precious object she owns. When Rebecca was eager to carry away the roughly-made cradle in which her infant died rather than the beautiful ebony chest inlaid with ivory which her husband had taken in pledge from an Egyptian, who could blame her? Lights shone from every window and tent door, and torches or lanterns blazed from the roof of all the better dwellings to welcome the coming host.

At the feast which had been held on the night of the harvest festival not a table had lacked its

lamb roast with fire, but in this hour of waiting the housewives again offered such food as they had ready. The narrow street of the little town was alive with stir; the waning stars had never before looked down on such joyful faces, such bright and eager eyes, such beaming looks of hope and happy faith.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN morning dawned all those who had not already gone forth to greet the wanderers were gathered on the roof of one of the largest houses in Succoth, where the coming Hebrews were to make their first long halt.

Hurrying on before them, fleet-footed men and boys, one after another, arrived in the town. Aminadab's house was their goal. It consisted of two buildings, one of which was inhabited by Nahshon, the son of the owner, and his family. In the other and larger part, besides the master of the house and his wife, his son-in-law, Aaron, dwelt with his wife, children and grandchildren, and also Miriam.

The old man, a prince of a tribe, who had given over the duties connected with his position to his son Nahshon, stretched out his trembling hands toward each messenger, and listened to his story with sparkling eyes that were nearly blinded by tears. He had persuaded his old wife to sit in the arm-

chair in which she was to be carried after their people, so that she might become accustomed to it, and for the same reason he was reclining in his.

When the old woman heard the messengers announce that the glorious future that had been promised the people was now within reach, her eyes sought her husband's and she cried: "Aye, through Moses!" For she held the brother of her daughter's husband in high esteem and it pleased her to see his prophecies fulfilled. She looked also with pride on Aaron, her son-in-law: but above all she loved Eleazar, her grandson, in whom she looked forward to the development of a second Moses. She had found Miriam, after the death of her parents, a very welcome house companion. But the warm-hearted old folks' affection for the grave young maid never grew to parental tenderness, and Elisheba, Aaron's busy wife, would not share the cares of the great household with Miriam; nor did their son Nahshon's wife need her help, for she, indeed, lived with her nearest of kin under their own roof. But the old people were grateful to Miriam for her care of their grandchild Milcah, the daughter of Aaron and Elisheba, whom a great misfortune had changed from a happy child into a melancholy woman, for whom

all joy was dead. A few days after her marriage with a beloved husband he had allowed himself, in a fit of wrath, to lift his hand against an Egyptian taxgatherer, who, when Pharaoh was passing eastward by Succoth, wanted to drive off a large herd of his finest oxen for the kitchen of the Lord of two worlds. In consequence of this self-redress the unfortunate man had been taken as a State prisoner to work in the mines, and it was well known that the convicts there must perish, body and soul, of torturing overwork. Through the influence of Nun, Hosea's father, the prisoner's wife and household were spared from sharing this punishment. She, however, pined away more and more, and the only one who understood the way to rouse the pale, silent wife from her brooding was Miriam. To her had the deserted woman attached herself, and she followed Miriam when she practised the medical knowledge that she had learned, and carried remedies and alms into the huts of the poor.

The last messengers, whom Aminadab and his wife received on the roof, painted in dark colours the pain and misery of the wandering of which he had been a witness; but when a soft-hearted creature among them wept aloud at the great sufferings the women and children had undergone during the gale

from the desert, and gloomily foretold for the future horrors not less than those he so vividly remembered, the old man spoke words of comfort to him, reminding him of the almighty power of God, and of the force of habit, which would also help them. His wrinkled face expressed sincere hope, whereas in Miriam's beautiful but stern features there was little expression of the religious trust of which youth usually has more than age.

While the messengers went and came she did not stir from the side of the old people, and left it to her sister-in-law, Elisheba, and her serving maids, to give refreshments to the fatigued wanderers. She listened to them intently and with deep-drawn breath, though it appeared to her that all she learned forboded trouble. For she knew that only those who were attached to her brothers, the leaders of the people, would have found their way into the house that sheltered Aaron; and if their gladness was already drooping how must it be with the lukewarm and recalcitrant.

Now and then she would ask a question, as well as the old man, and as she spoke, the messengers, who heard her voice for the first time, looked up at her in surprise, for it was indeed sweet, though singularly deep.

After several runners had assured her, in answer to her inquiry, that Hosea, the son of Nun, had not come with the others, she dropped her head and asked no more, until pale Milcah, who followed her everywhere, cast a beseeching look from her black eyes and whispered "Reuben," the name of her imprisoned husband. Then the young girl kissed the lonely child and looked at her as though she had neglected something, and asked the messengers with pressing eagerness if they had heard anything of Reuben, who had been carried away to the mines. But only one had heard from a released criminal that Milcah's husband was alive in the copper mines in the district of Beck, near Mount Sinai. The news encouraged the young prophetess to assure Milcah with vivid warmth that when the people should march eastward they would certainly go to the mines to release the captive Hebrews who were there.

These were good words, and Milcah, who was leaning on the breast of her comforter, would gladly have heard more, but those who were looking out into the distance from Aminadab's roof were now in great excitement. From the north came a dark cloud, and directly after a wonderful muttering, then a loud roar, and lastly a thousand-voiced cry and

shout, with bellowing, neighing and bleating, such as had never been heard before—and the multitudinous and many-voiced mass of men and herds came rolling along in that interminable stream which the astrologer's grandson, when watching from the temple at Tanis, had taken for the serpent from the nether world.

Even now, by the light of dawn, it was easy to mistake it for an army of disembodied spirits driven from the stronghold of the dead; for a pale gray column of dust reaching to the blue heavens swept before them, and no single figure could be distinguished among the immense, swarming, noisy throng which was enveloped in the cloud. Every now and again the sunbeams caught the metal point of a lance or of a brass vessel with a bright gleam, and the loud shout of one voice could be heard above the others.

Now the foremost waves of the stream had reached Aminadab's court yard, in front of which lay a vast tract of pasture lands.

Commands rang out, and the multitude halted and parted like a mountain lake which, flooded in spring, overflows in brooks and tiny rills. However, the narrow streams soon reunited, and, taking possession of the broad, level meadows now wet with

morning dew, the procession of men and beasts settled down to rest, and there the veil of dust that had hidden them presently vanished.

The road remained for some time wrapped in the cloud, but in the fields, men, women and children were to be seen in the blaze of the rising sun, with oxen and asses, sheep and goats; and in a little while tent after tent was erected on the land round Aminadab's and Nahshon's houses. The cattle were penned in with hurdles; poles and stakes were driven into the hard ground, awnings spread, cows fettered, herds of oxen and sheep driven to water, and fires lighted. Long files of women, carrying jars on their heads, which they balanced with easily and beautifully-curved arms, passed by to the well behind the old sycomore, or the bank of the nearest canal.

To-day, as on every other work-day, a humped ox turned the water wheel. It irrigated the land which the owner of the oxen must leave on the morrow; but the slave that drove it thought not of the morrow, and, as no one hindered him, worked on in the stolid way he was used to, watering the grass for the enemy into whose hands it would fall.

It was a long hour before the wandering crowd had all reached the camp, and Miriam, as she de-

scribed to Aminadab—whose eyes were no longer strong enough to see at a distance—what was going on down below, beheld many a sight from which she would gladly have turned away her eyes.

She dared not tell the old man openly all she saw, for it would have destroyed his glad hopefulness. She, who trusted with the whole ardour of an inspired soul in the God of her fathers, had shared till yesterday the confidence of the old man, although the Lord had certainly granted her the fatal gift of seeing things and hearing words no one else could comprehend. This generally took place in her dreams, but also in lonely hours when she fixed her mind in meditation on the past and the future.

The message from the Most High, which Ephraim had carried to Hosea in her name, had come to her from invisible lips as she sat under the sycomore, thinking of the exodus, and of the man she had loved from her childhood; and this very morning, between midnight and dawn, as she lay under the venerable tree, overpowered by fatigue, it seemed to her that she had again heard the same voice. The words had vanished from her mind as she woke, but she knew that they had been sad and ominous.

Vague as the warning had been, it still haunted her painfully, and the cry which came up from the

plain was certainly no shout of joy at having happily reached their brethren and the first stage of their wanderings, as the old man at her side believed; nay, it was the angry cry of fierce, ungoverned men, wrangling and fighting for a pleasant spot in the meadow whereon to pitch their tents, or for a good watering place for their beasts by the well or on the banks of the water-courses.

Rage, disappointment and despair were heard in that cry; and presently, looking round for the spot whence it rose the loudest, she beheld a woman's corpse borne along by some bondsmen on a sheet of tent-cloth, and a pale babe, touched by the finger of death, which its father, a wild-looking fellow, carried in one arm, while he shook his clenched left hand, which was free, with threatening gestures in the direction of her brothers.

And in a moment she saw an old man, bent with hard labour, lift up his hand against Moses, whom he would have struck to the ground if others had not dragged him away.

She could no longer bear to stay on the roof. Pale and panting she flew out to the camp. Milcah followed her closely, and wherever they met people belonging to Succoth they were greeted with respect. The people of Zoan, and those of Pha-kos, whom

they met in the way, did not know Miriam; still, the prophetess' tall figure and noble dignity made them move aside for her, or reply to her questions.

Then she heard terrible and evil tidings, for the multitude which had set forth so joyfully on the first day had crept along in dejection and woe on the second. The hot wind had broken the spirit and strength of many who had started in high health, and other sick folks, besides the bondsman's wife and infant, had fallen sick of fever from the choking dust and scorching heat, and the speaker pointed to a procession making its way to the Hebrew burying-place of Succoth. Nor were those who were being borne to the rest whence there is no return, women and children only, or such as their kindred had brought away sick rather than leave them behind; but likewise men, who only yesterday had been strong, and who had either sunk under too heavy a burden or had heedlessly exposed themselves to the sun's rays as they drove their herds onward.

In one tent Miriam found a young mother, who lay trembling with fever, and she bade Milcah go fetch her case of medicines. The forlorn wife gladly and quickly departed on this errand. On her way she stopped many a passer-by to inquire timidly for her captive husband, but she could get no news of

him. Miriam, however, learned from Nun, Hosea's father, that Eliab, the freedman he had left behind, had sent him word that his son was ready to follow his people. She also heard that Ephraim had been hurt and had found shelter in Hosea's tent.

Was the lad seriously ill, or what could it be that detained his uncle in Tanis? The question filled Miriam's heart with fresh anxiety, yet she dispensed help and comfort wherever it was possible with unflagging energy.

Old Nun's hearty greeting had cheered her; and no more stalwart, kind, or more lovable old man could be imagined. The mere sight of his noble head with its thick, snow-white hair and beard, and the bright eyes which sparkled with youthful fire in the handsome face, had done her good; and when he expressed his joy at seeing her once more, in his vivid and winning manner, pressing her to his heart and kissing her brow, she told him that she had bidden his son, in the name of the Lord, henceforth to bear the name of Joshua, and had called upon him to be reunited to his people and to be the captain of their host. Then she felt, indeed, as though she had found a father in the place of him she had lost, and applied herself with renewed vigour to the stern duties which called her from every side.

Nor was it a small effort to the lofty-minded maiden to devote herself with loving kindness to her fellow-creatures, whose wild and coarse demeanour pained her soul. The women, indeed, were glad of help, but to the men, who had grown up under the overseer's whip, modesty and consideration were unknown. Their minds were as savage as their manners. As soon as they knew who she was, they reviled her because her brother had tempted them forth to leave endurable woes and rush to a fearful fate; and as she heard their curses and blaspheming, and saw the fierce black eyes that glittered in those brown faces all hung about with rough, curling black hair and beard, her heart shrank within her. And yet she was able to control her fear and aversion; her pulses throbbed and she was prepared for the worst, yet she did but commend the men who were so repulsive to her to the God of their fathers and His promises, though womanly weakness prompted her to flee. Now, indeed, she understood what the sad, warning voice forboded which she had heard under the sycamore, and as she stood by the bed of a young mother sick unto death, she lifted up her hands and heart to the Most High, and made a vow that she would dedicate all her power to fight against the faint-hearted want of faith and the wild insubordi-

nation which threatened to bring her people into great straits. The Lord Almighty had promised them a fair land, and the short-sighted pride of a few erring ones should not cheat them of it. And God himself could hardly be wroth with a race which was content so long as their bodies were supplied with the food they needed, and which had endured scorn and blows as unresistingly as cattle. The multitude did not yet understand that they must live through the night of their present woes to be worthy of the day which awaited them.

Her medicines seemed to relieve the sick woman, and she quitted the tent in revived spirits to seek her brothers.

In the camp matters were no better, and again she witnessed many scenes which shocked her soul and made her regret that she had brought with her the tender-hearted Milcah.

Certain evildoers among the bondsmen, who had laid hands on the cattle and goods of others, had been caught and tied up to a palm tree; and the ravens which had followed the tribes, and had found ample food by the way, were already croaking greedily round the hastily contrived gallows tree.

None knew who was judge or executioner of the sentence; but the owners who were assisting in the

deed thought themselves fully justified and gloried in it. With hasty steps and averted head, Miriam drew the trembling Milcah away and placed her in the charge of her uncle, Nahshon, to be conducted home. Nahshon was just parting from the man who shared with him the rank of prince of the tribe of Judah. This was that same Hur who had won the first victory against the Egyptians at the head of the shepherds, and he now led the maiden with happy pride towards a man and a youth—his son and grandson. They had both been in the service of the Egyptians, and at Memphis had worked as goldsmiths and brass founders to Pharaoh. The elder, by reason of his skill, had received the name of Uri, or the Great; and the son of this father, Hur's grandson, Bezaleel, was said to be more gifted even than his father, though as yet hardly more than a youth.

Hur gazed at his child and grandchild with justifiable pride, for although they had both risen to high esteem among the Egyptians they had followed without demur at their father's bidding, leaving behind them much to which their hearts clung and which bound them to Memphis, to join the wandering people and share their uncertain fate.

Miriam warmly greeted the newcomers; and the

men before her, representatives of three generations, afforded a picture on which no kindly eye could fail to rest with pleasure. The grandfather was nigh on fifty, but, although there was much silver mingled with his ebony black hair, he still held himself as straight as a young man, and his thin, sharply-cut features revealed an unbending determination, which sufficiently accounted for the readiness with which his son and grandson had obeyed his call. Uri, too, was a well-grown man, and Bezaleel a lad in whom it could be seen that he had made good use of his nineteen years, and could already stand firmly on his own feet. His artist's eye sparkled with a peculiar light, and when presently he and his father took leave of Miriam to pay their respects to Caleb, their grandfather and greatgrandfather, she heartily congratulated Hur, her brother's truest friend, on having such descendants to keep up the noble race.

At this Hur, taking her hand, exclaimed with a grateful fervour, which sprang from his heart, and which was usually foreign to the stern, imperious nature of this chief of an unruly tribe of herdsmen: "Yes, they have ever been good and true and dutiful. God hath protected them and granted me to see this joyful day. Now it lies with you to make it a high feast-day. You must long since have seen that

my eye was ever on you, and that you are dear to my heart. I as a man, and you as a woman are pledged to do all that is best for the people and their welfare, and that constitutes a bond between us. But I would fain be bound to you by a yet stronger tie, and whereas your parents are dead, and I cannot go to Amram with the bride's gift in my hand and pay him for you, I ask you of yourself in marriage, noble maiden. And before you say me yea or nay let me tell you that my son and grandson are ready to honour you as the head of our house as they honour me, and that I have your brother's permission to approach you as a suitor."

Miriam had listened to this proposal in speechless surprise. She held the man who pleaded so warmly in high esteem, and was well inclined toward him. Notwithstanding his ripe age he stood before her in all the strength of manhood and lofty dignity, and the beseeching of his eyes, more wont to command, went to her soul.

But she looked for another with ardent longing, and her only reply was a regretful shake of the head.

But this man, the head of his tribe, who was accustomed to go straight to the end of anything he

had resolved upon, was not deterred by this silent rejection, and went on more fervently than before: "Do not in one moment overthrow the cherished hopes of many years! Is it my age that repels you?"

And once more Miriam shook her head. But Hur again spoke:

"That, indeed, was what troubled me, although in strength and vigour I could measure myself against many a younger man. And if you could but overlook your suitor's gray hairs you might perhaps bring yourself to consider his request. Of the truth and devotion of my soul I will say nothing. No man sues to a woman at my age unless his heart urges him with great power. But there is another thing which to me seems of no less weight. I would fain, as I have said, take you home to my house. There it stands; it is strong and roomy enough; but from to-morrow a tent must be our roof, a camp our dwelling place, and wild deeds will be done there. Look only on the hapless creatures they have bound to that palm tree. There is no judge to try the accused; the hasty impulse of the people is their only law. No one is secure even of his life, least of all a woman, however strong she may feel herself, who casts in her lot with those against whom the

multitude murmur. Your parents are dead, your brothers might protect you, but if the multitude should lay hands on them the stone over which you hoped to cross the flood will drag you to the bottom."

"And if I were your wife, drag you with me," replied Miriam, and her thick, black brows were gloomily knit.

"That danger I am prepared to face," answered Hur. "Our lot is in the hands of the Lord; my faith is as firm as yours, and behind me stands the whole tribe of Judah, which follows me and Nahshon as a flock follow the shepherd. Old Nun and the Ephraimites are faithful to us, and if it came to the worst it would be our duty to perish as God wills, or, after reaching the Promised Land, to wait in patience for our latter end in faithful union, in wealth and power."

At this Miriam looked him full and fearlessly in the eyes, and laid her hand on his arm, saying:

"Such words are worthy of the man I have revered from my childhood, the father of such sons. Yet I cannot be your wife."

"You cannot?"

"Nay, my lord, I cannot."

"A hard saying, but I must be content," replied Hur, and he bowed his head sadly.

But Miriam went on:

"Nay, Hur, you have a right to ask the reason of my refusal, and inasmuch as I honour you I owe you the simple truth. My heart is set on another man of our people. I first saw him while I was but a child. Like your son and grandson, he joined himself to the Egyptians. But he, like them, has heard the call of God and of his father, and if he, like Uri and Bezaleel, has obeyed them, and still desires to have me to wife, I will go to him if it be the Lord's will, whom I serve and who grants me of His grace to hear His voice. But I will ever think thankfully of you." As she spoke the girl's large eyes glistened through tears, and her gray haired suitor's voice quivered as he asked her shyly and hesitatingly:

"But if the man you wait for—I do not seek to know his name—if he turns a deaf ear to the call that has gone forth to him, if he refuses to throw in his lot with the uncertain lot of his nation?"

"That can never be!" cried Miriam; but a cold chill ran through her veins, as Hur exclaimed:

"There is no never, no certainty save with God. And if in spite of your high faith, things fall out other than you expect—if the Lord deny you the desire which first grew up in your heart when you were yet but a foolish child?"

"Then will He show me the right way, by which He hath led me until now."

"Well, well," said Hur, "build on that foundation; and if the man of your choice is worthy of you and becomes your husband, my soul shall rejoice without envy if the Lord shall bless your union. But if, indeed, God wills it otherwise, and you shall crave a strong arm on which to lean, here am I. The heart and the tent of Hur will be ever open to you."

He hurried away. Miriam gazed after him, lost in thought, till the proud and princely figure was out of sight.

Then she made her way back toward the home of her protectors; but as she crossed the wad leading to Tanis she paused to look northward. The dust was laid and the road could be traced far into the distance; but he, the one who should be riding

toward her and toward his people, was not in sight. It was with a heavy sigh and drooping head that she went on her way, and the sound of her brother Moses' deep voice made her start as she reached the sycomore.

JOSHUA.

CHAPTER XIII.

AARON and Eleazar in stirring words had reminded the murmuring, disheartened people of the might and promises of their God. Those who had stretched themselves out quietly to rest, after being refreshed by drink and food, found their lost confidence revived. The freed bondsmen remembered the cruel slavery and degrading blows from which they had escaped, acknowledging, as the others did, that it was by God's providence that Pharaoh was not pursuing them. The rich supplies, which were still being distributed from the plundered storehouse, contributed not a little to reanimate their courage, and the serfs and lepers—for they, for the most part, had marched forth also, and were resting outside the camp—in short, all those for whose maintenance Pharaoh had provided, knew that for some time they were secure from need and want. Nevertheless there was no lack of discontented spirits, and now and then, without any one knowing who had started the question, it was asked if it would not be

wiser to turn back and trust to Pharaoh's forgiveness. Those who uttered it did so secretly, and had often to take a sharp or threatening answer.

Miriam had come out to meet her brothers, and shared their anxiety. How quickly had the spirit of the people been broken in this short march by the hot desert wind! How impatient, how distrustful, how rebellious they had shown themselves at the very first adversity! How unbridled in following their own wild impulses!

When they had been called together for prayer on the way, a short time before sunrise, some had turned toward the sun as it rose in the east, some had pulled out images of the gods which they had brought with them, and others again had fixed their eyes on the acacia-trees by the road, which were regarded as sacred in many of the provinces by the Nile. What indeed, could they know of the God who had commanded them to leave so much behind them and to carry such a burden? Many of them were even now quite disheartened; and as yet they had faced no real danger, for Moses had purposed to lead his people by the direct road to Philistia into the Promised Land of Palestine, but their demeanour forced him to give up this plan and to think of another.

- In order to reach the highway which connected Asia and Africa it was necessary to pass over the isthmus which really divides rather than it unites the two continents; but it was well defended from invaders, and the way was secure against fugitives, partly by natural and partly by artificial obstacles. A succession of deep lakes broke the level land, and where these did not check the wanderers' march, strong fortifications towered up in which lay Egyptian troops ready to fight.

Khetam, or, as the Israelites called it, Etham, was the name of this range of forts, and the nearest and strongest could be reached in a few hours by the tribes who were marching from Succoth.

With the people full of the spirit of their God, inspired and prepared for the worst, freed from their chains and rejoicing in their newly gained liberty, rushing along toward the Promised Land, Moses and the other leaders with him had intended that, like a mountain torrent bursting through dams and sluices, they should annihilate and destroy all who came in their way. With this inspirited throng, whose bold advance might achieve the highest triumphs, and to whom cowardly retreat could have meant nothing but death and destruction, they had expected to overthrow the works of the Etham

frontier like a pile of brushwood. But now that a few short hours of weariness and suffering had quenched the fire in their souls, now that on every side could be seen for every happy, elated man, two indifferent and five discontented or frightened, the storming of the Etham lines would have cost streams of blood and would have risked all that they had already gained.

The conquest of the little garrison in the store-house at Pithom happened under such favourable circumstances as they could not expect to occur again, and so the original plan had to be altered, and an attempt made to get round the fortresses. Instead of marching north-east the people turned toward the south. But before this could be accomplished, Moses and a few proved men were to reconnoitre the new route, and see whether it were passable for a vast multitude on foot.

These things were discussed under the sycomore tree in front of Aminadab's house, and Miriam listened, a mute witness.

When the men held counsel, the women, and she also, had to be silent, but she found it hard to hold her peace when they came to the conclusion that they must avoid attacking the forts, even if Hosea, the man skilled in war and chosen by the

Lord Himself to be the sword of Jehovah, should return.

"Of what avail is the bravest leader when there is no army to obey him?" cried Nahshon, the son of Aminadab, and the rest had been of his opinion.

When at length the assembled elders parted, Moses took leave of his sister with brotherly tenderness. She knew that he had it in his mind to go forth into fresh dangers, and in the modest way she always used when she ventured to speak to the man who, in body and mind, was so far above all others, she told him of her fears. He looked her in the face with kindly reproof, and with his right hand pointed to heaven. She understood him, and kissed his hand with grateful warmth, saying: "Thou art under the shield of the Most High, and I fear no longer."

He pressed his lips to her brow, and taking her tablets from her, wrote on them a few words and cast them into the hollow stem of the sycomore.

"For Hosea—nay, for Joshua," said he, "if he should come while I am absent. The Lord hath great things for him to do when he shall have learned to trust in him rather than in the mighty ones of the earth."

He quitted her; but Aaron, who, as being the

elder, was the head of the family, remained with Miriam and told her that a worthy man had asked for her to wife; she turned pale and answered: "I know it."

He looked her in the face, much surprised, and went on in a tone of grave warning:

"It must be as you will, but it would be well that you should reflect that your heart belongs to God and to your people; the man whom you marry must be as ready as yourself to serve them both, for two become one when they are wed, and if the highest aim of one is as naught to the other they are no more one, but two. The voice of the senses which called them together is presently silent, and what remains is a gulf between them."

With these words he left her, and she, too, turned to quit the assembly, for perhaps now, on the eve of their departing, she might be needed in the house of which she was an inmate; but a new incident arose to keep her by the sycomore, as if she were bound and fettered to it.

What could the packing matter and the care for perishable treasure and wordly goods, when questions here were raised which stirred her whole soul. There was Elisheba, Nahshon's wife, and any housewife or slave woman could do the home work; here

there were other matters to decide, the weal or woe of the nation.

Certain men of the better sort from among the people had by this time joined themselves to the elders under the sycomore, but Hur had departed with Moses.

Now Uri, the son of Hur, came into the group. He, as a metal worker, but just come from Egypt, had at Memphis had dealings with many about the court, and he had heard that the King would be willing to relieve the Hebrews of their heaviest burdens and to grant them new privileges, if only Moses would entreat the God he served to be favourable to Pharaoh and persuade the people to return so soon as they should have sacrificed in the desert. So the assembly now proceeded to discuss whether envoys should not be sent to Tanis to treat once more with the "High Gate."

This proposal, which he had not, indeed, dared to lay before his father, had been made by Uri in all good faith to the assembled elders, and he hoped that its acceptance might save the Hebrews much suffering. But hardly had he ended his very clear and persuasive speech when old Nun, Hosea's father, who had with difficulty held his peace, started up in wrath.

The old man's face, usually so cheerful, was crimson with anger, and its deep hue was in strange contrast with the thick, white hair which hung about it. Only a short while since he had heard Moses reject similar proposals with stern decision and the strongest arguments; and now must he hear them repeated? And by many signs of approval on the part of those assembled he saw that the great undertaking for which he, more than any one, had staked and sacrificed his all, was imperilled. It was too much for the vehement old man, and it was with a flashing eye and threatening fists that he exclaimed:

"What words are these? Shall we reknit the ends of the cord which the Lord our God hath cut? Are we to tie it, do you say, with a knot so loose that it will hold just so long as the present mood of an irresolute weakling, who has broken his word to Moses and to us a score of times? Would you have us return into the cage from which the Almighty hath released us by a miracle? Are we to stand before the Lord our God as false debtors? Shall we take the false gold which is offered us rather than the royal treasure which He hath promised us? Oh, man! You who have come from the Egyptian! I would I could——"

And the fierce old man shook his fist; but be-

fore he had spoken the threat which was on his lips he ceased and his arm fell, for Gabriel, the elder of the tribe of Zebulun, called out:

“Remember your own son, who at this day is still content to dwell among the enemies of Israel!”

The blow had told; but it was only for a moment that the fiery patriarch's high spirit was quelled. Above the hubbub of voices which rose in disapproval of Gabriel's malice, and the lesser number who took part with him, Nun's was heard: “It is by reason of the fact that, besides the loss of the ten thousand acres of land which I have left behind, I may, perchance, have also to sacrifice my noble son in obedience to the word of the Lord, that I have a right to speak my mind.”

His broad breast heaved sorrowfully as he spoke, and now his eyes, beneath their thick, white brows, fell with a milder gleam on the son of Hur, who had turned pale under this violent address, and he went on: “This man is indeed a good son and obedient to his father, and he, too, has made a sacrifice, for he has come away from his work, in which he won great praise, and from his home in Memphis, and the blessing of the Lord rest upon him! But inasmuch as he has obeyed that bidding, he ought not to try to undo that which, by the Lord's help, we have

begun. And to you, Gabriel, I say that my son is of a surety not content to dwell with the enemy; nay, that he will obey my voice and join himself to us, even as Uri, the first-born son of Hur. Whatever keeps him back, it is some good reason of which Hosea need not be ashamed, nor I, his father. I know him. I trust him for that; and he who looks for aught else from him will of a surety, by my son's dealings, sooner or later, be shown to be a liar."

He ceased, pushing his white hair back from his heated brow; and as no one contradicted him he turned again to the metal worker, saying with hearty kindness: "It was not your meaning, Uri, which roused my ire. Your will is good; but you have measured the greatness and glory of the God of our fathers by the standard of the false gods of the Egyptians, who perish and revive again, and, as Aaron has said, are but a small part of Him who is in all, and through all, and above all. Till Moses showed me the way, I, too, believed I was serving the Lord by slaying an ox, a lamb or a goose on an altar, as the Egyptians do; and now, if your eyes are opened, as mine were by Moses, to behold Him who rules the world and who hath chosen us to be His people, you, like me and all of us—yes, and

ere long my own son—will feel the fire kindled for sacrifice in your own hearts—a fire that never dies out, and consumes everything which does not turn to love, and truth, and faith, and worship of Him. For the Lord hath promised us great things by the word of His servant Moses: Redemption from bondage, that we may be free lords and masters henceforth on our own soil and in a fair land which is ours and our children's for ever! We are on our way to this gift, and whosoever would delay us on our way, or desire us to return and crawl back into the net whose meshes of brass we have burst asunder, counsels the people to become as sheep who leap back into the fire from which they have escaped. I am not wroth with you now, for I read in your face that you know how greatly you have erred; but hereby ye all shall know that I heard from the lips of Moses but a few hours since, that whosoever shall counsel a return or any covenant with the Egyptians, he himself will accuse as contemning the Lord Jehovah our God, and as the destroyer and foe of his people."

At this Uri went up to the old man, held out his hand, and, deeply persuaded in his heart of the justice of his reproof, exclaimed: "No dealings, no covenant with the Egyptians! And I am grateful to

you, Nun, for having opened my eyes. The hour is at hand when you, or another who stands nearer to Him than I, shall teach me to know more perfectly the God who is my God likewise."

Hereupon he went away with the old man, who leaned his arm upon his shoulder.

Miriam had listened with breathless eagerness to Uri's last appeal, and when he gave utterance to the wish to know more perfectly the God of his fathers, her eyes shone with inspired ecstasy. She felt that her spirit was full of the greatness of the Most High, and that she had the gift of speech wherewith to make known to others the knowledge she herself possessed. But the custom of her people required her to be silent. Her heart burned within her; and when she had again mingled with the crowd, and assured herself that Hosea was not yet come, as it was now dusk she went up to the roof, there to sit with the others.

None seemed to have missed her, not even poor, forlorn Milcah, and she felt herself alone indeed in this house. If Joshua might but come! If only she might find a strong breast on which to lean, if this sense of being a stranger among her kindred might have an end—this useless life under the roof which

she must call her home, although she had never felt at home there!

Moses and Aaron, her brothers, had departed, and had taken with them Hur's grandson; and she, who lived and breathed only for her people and their well-being, had not been found worthy to be told more particularly whither they were faring, or to what end. Ah! why had the Almighty, to whom she had devoted herself, body and soul, given her the spirit and mind of a man in the form of a woman?

She waited awhile as if to see whether, of all this circle of kind hearts, her kith and kin, there was not one to love her, listening to the chatter of old and young who surrounded her; but Eleazar's children gathered about their grandparents, and she had never had the art of attracting the little ones. Dame Elisheba was directing the slaves who were putting the finishing touches to the baggage. Milcah sat with a cat in her lap, gazing into vacancy, and the bigger lads were out of doors. No one noticed her or spoke to her.

Bitter sorrow fell upon her. After eating her supper with the others, making a great effort not to cast the gloom of her own dark mood over the happy excitement of the children, who looked forward with

great glee to their departing, she felt she must get out into the free air.

Veiling her face closely, she crossed the camp alone. But the scenes she saw there were ill-fitted to lift the burden that weighed upon her. It was still astir, and although here and there pious songs rang out, full of triumph and hope, there was more quarrelling to be heard, and rebellious uproar. Whenever threats or reviling against her great brothers met her ear she hastened forward; but she could not run away from her anxiety as to what might happen at sunrise, when the people were to set forth, if the malcontents gained the upper hand. She knew that the multitude must necessarily move onward; still she had never been able to subdue her fears of Pharaoh's mighty army. It was personified to her in Hosea's heroic form. If the Lord of Hosts Himself were not with the ranks of these wretched bondsmen and shepherds who were squabbling and fighting all about her, how should they be able to stand against the tried and well armed troops of Egypt, with their chariots and horses?

She had heard that men had been placed on guard at every part of the camp, and ordered to blow a blast on a horn, or drum on a metal plate in the event of the enemy's approach, till the Hebrews

should have come together at the spot where the alarm should be first sounded.

She stood for some time listening for some such call, but yet more eagerly for the hoofs of a solitary horse, the firm tread and the deep voice of the warrior for whom she longed.

Looking for him she made her way to the northern side of the camp next the road to Tanis, where, too, by Moses' order, the larger portion of the fighting men had pitched their tents. Here she had hoped to find nothing but confidence, but as she listened to the talk of the men-at-arms, who sat in large parties round the watch-fires, she shuddered to hear that Uri's counsel had reached even to them. Many of them were husbands and fathers, had left a house or a plot of land, a business or an office, and although many spoke of the commands of the Lord and of the fair land promised them by God, others were minded to turn back. She would gladly have gone among them and have called upon these blind hearts to obey the bidding of the Lord and of her brother. But here again she must keep silence. However, she might at any rate listen, and she was most tempted to linger where she might expect to hear rebellious words and counsels.

There was a mysterious charm in this painful

excitement. She felt as though she had been robbed of a pleasure when the fires died out, the men retired to rest and silence fell.

Now, for the last time, she gazed out on the way from Tanis, but nothing stirred except the watch pacing to and fro.

As yet she had not despaired of Hosea's coming, for the bidding she had sent him in the full conviction that it was the Lord Himself who had chosen her to deliver it must certainly have reached him; now, however, as she read in the stars that it was past midnight, she began to reflect how many years he had dwelt among the Egyptians, and that he might think it unworthy of a man to hearken to the call of a woman, even when she spoke in the name of the Most High. She had endured much humiliation this day; why should not this also be hanging over her? To the man she loved, likewise, she ought, perhaps, to have kept silence and have left it to her brothers to declare the Lord's behests to him.

CHAPTER XIV,

MUCH disturbed and grieved by such thoughts as these, Miriam turned her steps homewards to retire to rest; but as she reached the threshold she stayed her steps and listened once more, gazing northwards whence Hosea must come. Nothing was to be heard but the tramp of a watchman, and the voice of Hur as he went the rounds of the camp with a company of armed men.

He, too, had found it impossible to rest within.

The night was mild, and bright with stars; the hour meet for silent dreaming under the sycomore. Her seat was vacant under the ancient tree, so with a bowed head she made her way to the favourite spot which on the morrow she must quit for ever. But she had not reached the bench when she suddenly stopped, raised her head, and pressed her hand to her panting bosom. She had heard the tramp of hoofs, she was sure of it, and the sound came from the north. Were the chariots of Pharaoh hurrying down from the north to fall upon the

Hebrew camp? Should she shout to wake the men at arms? Or could it indeed be he whom she so passionately longed for? Yes, yes! It was the step of a single horse, and it must be some new arrival, for there was a stir among the tents, and the barking of dogs, and shouts and eager talking came nearer and nearer as the horseman approached.

It was Hosea, she felt certain.

That he should have ridden forth through the night, and torn asunder the ties which bound him to Pharaoh and his brethren in arms, was a proof of his obedience. Love had steeled his will and lent speed to his steed, and the thanks which love alone can give, the reward which love alone can bestow, should no longer be withheld from him. He should learn in her arms that, though he had given up much, it was to earn something sweeter and fairer. She felt as though the night about her was as bright as noonday when her ear told her that the rider was making straight for Aminadab's dwelling. By that she knew that it was her call that had brought him to seek her, before going to his father, who had found a lodging in the empty, roomy house belonging to his grandson Ephraim.

Hosea would gladly have flown to her side as fast as his horse could carry him, but it was not

safe to ride at too brisk a pace through the camp. Oh, and how long the minutes seemed till at last she saw the horseman, till he leaped from the saddle, and his companion flung the reins to another man who came behind.

It was indeed Hosea. But his 'comrade—whom she saw quite plainly, and started at the sight—was Hur, the very man who, a few hours since, had asked her to be his wife.

There they stood, side by side in the starlight, the two men her suitors, their figures lighted up by the blazing pine-torches which were still burning by the carts and litters where they stood ready for the next morning's march.

The elder Hebrew, a splendid man, was much taller than the younger and no less strongly-built warrior, and the lord of many herds held his head no less high than the Egyptian hero. Both spoke with grave decision; but her lover's voice was the deeper and fuller. Now they were so close to her that she could hear what they were saying.

Hur was telling the new-comer that Moses had gone forth to reconnoitre, and Hosea expressed his regret, as he had a matter of importance to discuss with him.

In that case he would have to set forth with

them at day-break, Hur observed, for Moses thought to meet the people on the way. Then he pointed to the house of Miriam's protector, Aminadab, which lay in total darkness unbroken by a single twinkling light, and desired Hosea to come with him and spend the remainder of the night under his roof, for that no doubt he would fain not rouse his father at so late an hour. At this, as Miriam saw, her friend hesitated, and looked enquiringly up at the women's rooms and the roof; and then, knowing whom he sought, and unable any longer to resist the impulse of her heart, she went forward from under the shadow of the sycomore and warmly bid Hosea welcome. He, too, scorned to conceal the joy of his heart; and Hur, standing by, saw the reunited pair clasp hands, at first in silence and then with eager words of greeting.

"I knew that you would come!" cried Miriam, and Hosea replied with glad emotion:

"That you might easily know, O Prophetess, for one of the voices that bid me hither was your own." Then he added more calmly: "I hoped to find your brother here with you, for I am the bearer of a message of the greatest importance to him, to us, and to the people. I find all made ready for departing, and I should be sorry if your venerable

protectors were roused from their rest and hurried forward to a perilous adventure which it still seems possible to avert."

"You mean?"—asked Hur, and he came closer.

"I mean," replied Joshua, "that if Moses persists in leading the multitude forth Eastward, there will be much useless bloodshed to-morrow; for I heard at Tanis that the garrisons of Etham have orders not to let a single man pass, much less this countless multitude whose numbers dismayed me as I rode through the Camp. I know Apoo who commands the forts, and the legions who serve under him. There will be a fearful and fruitless butchery among our unarmed and undisciplined tribes—in short I must speak strongly to Moses and immediately, to avert the worst, before it is too late."

"We have not failed to fear all that you can warn us of," replied Hur, "and it is expressly to avert it that Moses has set forth on a perilous journey."

"Whither?" asked Joshua.

"That is the secret of the leaders of the people."

"Among them my father?"

"No doubt; and I am ready to lead you to him. If he thinks fit to inform you—"

"If that is contrary to his duty he will be silent. Who leads the marching host to-morrow?"

"I do."

"You?" cried Hosea in surprise, and the other quietly replied:

"You are amazed that a shepherd should be so bold as to lead an army; but the Lord God of hosts, in whom we put our trust, is indeed our Captain, and I look for his guidance."

"It is well," replied Hosea. "But I too believe that the God of our fathers, who called me hither by the voice of Miriam, has entrusted me with a message of great importance. I must find Moses before it is too late."

"You have been told that till to-morrow, or even till the day after, he is beyond our reach, even mine. Will you meanwhile speak with Aaron?"

"Is he in the Camp?"

"No: but we look for his return before the departing of the people; that is to say in a few hours."

"Has he the right of deciding questions of importance, in the absence of Moses?"

"No; he only declares to the people in eloquent words that which his great brother commands."

At this the disappointed warrior gazed thought-

fully on the ground; but after a moment's reflection he eagerly went on:

"It is to Moses that the Lord our God declares his will; but to you too, his noble virgin sister,—to you too the Most High reveals himself."

"Oh Hosea!" the prophetess broke in, lifting her hands to him with an imploring and deprecating gesture; but the Captain paid no heed to her interruption, and went on in an earnest tone:

"The Lord God charged you to call me, His servant, back to His people; He commanded you to give me the name I am to bear instead of that given me by my father and mother, and which I have borne in honour for thirty years. In obedience to your bidding I have cast from me all that could make me great among men. It was when I was in the way to face death in Egypt, with my God and your image in my heart, that the message came to me which I am here to deliver, and I therefore believe that it was laid upon me by the Most High. I am constrained to deliver it to the leader of the nation; so, as I cannot find Moses, I can do no better than to deliver it to you, who, next to your brother, dwell nearest to God. I pray you now to hear me; but the words I have to speak are not ripe for any third hearer."

At this Hur drew himself up; breaking in on Hosea's speech, he asked Miriam whether it was her desire to hear what the Son of Nun should say without witnesses, and she replied in a low voice: "Yes."

Hur turned[•] to the warrior and said with cold pride:

"I believe that Miriam knows the will of the Lord, and likewise her brother's, and that she is aware of what beseems a woman of Israel. If I am not mistaken it was under this very tree that your own father, the venerable Nun, repeated to my son Uri the only reply which Moses will give to the bearer of any such message as yours."

"Do you know it then?" asked the soldier sternly.

"No," replied the other, "but I guess its purport. See here," he stooped with youthful agility, raised two large stones so that they supported each other, rolled a few smaller stones into a heap around them, and then in breathless eagerness spoke as follows:—

"This heap shall be a witness between me and thee, like the heap of Mizpah which Laban and

Jacob made when Laban called upon the Lord to watch between him and Israel; so do I now; and I show thee this heap that thou mayest remember it when we are absent one from another. I lay my hand on this heap of stones, and declare that I, Hur, the son of Caleb and Ephratah, put my trust in none other but only in the Lord, the God of our fathers, and am ready to do His bidding by which He calleth us out of the land of Pharaoh, to the land which He hath promised us. And thou, Hosea, the son of Nun, do I ask, and the Lord our God heareth thee: Dost thou look for any help other than that of the God of Abraham, who chose thy nation to be His own people? Moreover, thou shalt answer and say whether henceforth thou wilt hold the Egyptians who oppressed us, and out of whose hand the Lord our God hath promised to redeem us, as the foes for ever of thy God and thy people?"

There was a dark look in the warrior's bearded face, and he was inclined to throw down the heap of stones, and dismiss the overbold questioner with a wrathful reply; but Miriam had laid her hand on the top of the heap, and seizing his right hand she cried:

"He enquires of thee in the sight of our God and Lord, who is our witness!"

Joshua was able to control his wrath, and pressing the maiden's hand as he held it, he answered with due solemnity.

"He asks me, but I cannot answer him, for 'Yea' and 'Nay' say little in this case. Yet I call God to witness on my part; and here, by this heap of stones, you, Miriam, shall hear what I have in my mind, and wherefore I am come.

"And thou, Hur, see here! Like thee I lay my hand on the heap and testify that I, Joshua, the son of Nun, put my trust in none other but only in the Lord God of our fathers. He shall stand between thee and me as a witness, and decide whether my way is His way or the way of an erring man. I will walk in His way as he hath declared it to Moses and to this noble maiden. That I swear with an oath, and to that, God be my witness!"

Hur had listened eagerly, and now persuaded by the gravity of Joshua's speech, he cried:

"The Lord our God heard thine oath. And I too, by this heap, will take an oath. If the hour should come when, remembering this heap, thou shalt give the testimony which thou hast refused me,

no wrath henceforth shall come between us; and if it be the will of the Lord I will deliver into thy hands the leadership, for thou in many wars hast learned more skill than I, who have ruled only over herdsmen and flocks. And thou, Miriam, bear in mind that this heap is a witness of the words you twain shall speak here in the sight of God. Call to mind the wrathful words we heard spoken under this tree by this man's father; yea, and I call God to witness that I would have darkened the life of Uri my beloved son, who is the joy of my heart, if he had spoken to the people to persuade them by the message which he delivered to us; for it would have turned away those of little faith from their God. Remember this, Maiden, and again hear this: If thou need me thou canst find me. The door I opened, come what may, will never be shut."

And he turned away from Miriam and the soldier.

Something, they knew not what, had come over them. He, who all through his long ride, beset with many dangers, had longed with burning ardour for the moment which should see him re-united to the maid he loved, stood looking down in confusion and deep anxiety. Miriam, who at his approach, had been ready to bestow on him all that a woman

has of best and sweetest to reward truth and love withal, had sunk on the ground in front of the awful heap of stones close to the sycomore tree, and was pressing her head against its old hollow trunk.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR some time nothing was to be heard under the sycomore but the young girl's low sobbing and the impatient step of the warrior, who, while struggling for composure himself, did not venture to address her. He could not fully understand what this was that had suddenly come like a mountain between him and the woman he loved.

He had learnt from Hur's speech that Moses and his own father had each, severally, rejected all mediation; and yet to him, the promises he was empowered to make seemed a grace and gift from Heaven. As yet none of his nation had heard them, and if Moses were the man he believed him, the Lord must of a surety open his eyes and show him that He had chosen Hosea to guide the people to a happier future; nor did he doubt that he could easily win over his father Nun. It was in full conviction that he had sworn that it was indeed the Most High who had shown him this way; and after thinking all this over, as Miriam at length

rose, he went towards her with renewed hope. The love in his heart prompted him to clasp her in his arms; but she drew back, and her voice, usually so pure and full, sounded harsh and husky as she asked him wherefore he had tarried so long, and what it was that he purposed to reveal to her.

As she knelt under the sycomore she had not merely been praying and struggling for composure; she had looked into her soul. She loved Hosea, but her heart misgave her that he had some proposals to make such as Uri's, and old Nun's wrathful words rang in her ears louder than ever. Her fear lest her lover had gone astray into an evil way, and Hur's startling proceedings had lulled the surges of her passion; and her spirit, brought back to calmer reflection, now craved above all else to know what could so long have detained him whom she had sent for in the name of the Lord, and wherefore he had come alone, without Ephraim.

The clear sky, glorious with stars, instead of looking down on the bliss of a pair of reunited lovers, was witness only to the anxious questioning of a terrified woman, and the impatient answers of a hot-spirited and bitterly disappointed man.

He began by urging his love, and that he had come to make her his wife; but she, though she

suffered him to hold her hand, implored him to postpone his wooing, and to tell her first all she wanted to know.

On his way hither he had heard news of Ephraim from a fellow soldier from Tanis; he was therefore able to tell her that he had gone into the town in disobedience to orders, sick and weary as he was, and moved, it would seem, by curiosity, and that he had found care and shelter under a friendly roof. This however did not comfort Miriam, who blamed herself as she thought of the inexperienced and fatherless lad, who had grown up under her own eyes, and whom she herself had sent forth among strangers, as a guest under an Egyptian's roof.

However, Hosea assured her that he would take upon himself to bring the boy back to his people; and when she still was not satisfied he asked her whether he had indeed lost all her trust and love. But she, instead of giving him a word of comfort, began to question him further, desiring to know what had delayed his coming, so he was forced to tell his tale, though greatly disturbed and cut to the heart; beginning in fact with the end of his story.

While she listened to him, leaning against the trunk of the sycomore, he, distraught by love and impatience, paced up and down, or else, hardly

able to control himself, stood close to her, face to face. At this moment nothing seemed to him worthy to be clothed in speech but the passion and the hopes which filled his being. Had he been convinced that her heart was estranged from him, he would have fled from the camp as soon as he had unburthened his soul to his father, and have ridden away into the unknown in search of Moses. All he cared for was to win Miriam, and to keep clear of dishonour; and important as the events and hopes of the last few days had been, he answered her questions hastily, and as though the matters involved were but a light thing. He began his tale in broken sentences, and the oftener she interrupted him the more impatient he became, and the deeper the frown which knit his brows.

Hosea had been riding southward for some few hours, in high spirits and full of blossoming hopes, when, shortly before dusk, he perceived a large crowd of men marching on in front of him. At first he had taken them to be the rear guard of the fugitive Hebrews, and he had hastened his horse's pace. But before he came up with the wanderers, some peasant folk and drivers, leaving their carts and beasts of burthen in the lurch, had flown to meet him with loud shrieks and shouts of warning,

telling him that the troop in front were the multitude of lepers. And their warning was but too well justified, for the first who met him with the heart-breaking cry "Unclean, Unclean" bore the tokens of those who were a prey to the terrible disease; their dull eyes staring at him from faces devoid of eyebrows and covered with the white, scurfy dust peculiar to leprosy.

Hosea presently recognised one and another of them; among them here and there an Egyptian priest with shaven head, and Hebrew men and women. He questioned them with the calm severity of a warrior chief, and learned that they had come from the quarries opposite Memphis, their place of exile on the Eastern shore of the Nile. Certain Hebrews among them had heard that their people had fled from Egypt to seek a land which the Lord had promised them. On this many had determined to put their trust in the mighty God of their fathers, and to follow the wandering tribes; and the Egyptian priests even, who in their affliction had cast in their lot with the Hebrews, had set forth with them, fixing on Succoth as the goal of their wanderings, whither, as they heard, Moses was first to lead the people. But everyone who might have told them the road had fled at their approach; thus they had

gone too far to the northward, even almost as far as the fortress of Tabnae. It was at a mile from that place that Hosea had overtaken them, and had counselled their leaders to return forthwith, and not to bring misfortune on the host of their brethren. During their parley a company of Egyptian soldiers had come out from the citadel to meet the lepers and clear the road of their presence; however the captain, who knew Hosea, had used no force, and the two warriors had persuaded the leaders of the unclean to let themselves be guided to the peninsula of Sinai, where there was already a colony of lepers among the mountains, not far from the mines. They had yielded to this proposal because Hosea had promised them that if the Israelites wandered Eastward they would visit them and receive all who should be healed; but even if the Hebrews remained in Egypt, the pure air of the desert would bring health to many sufferers, and every one who recovered was free to return to his people.

All this consumed much time; and then other delays had occurred, for, as Hosea had been in such near neighbourhood to the lepers, he had been compelled to go to Tabnae, where he and the Captain of the troops, who had been with him, were sprinkled with the blood of birds, clothed in clean

linen, and obliged to go through certain ceremonials which he himself had deemed necessary, and which could only be performed in broad sunlight. His serving-man had not been suffered to leave the citadel; the soft-hearted fellow, seeing a kinsman among the hapless wretches, had clasped his hand.

The cause of this detention was saddening and sickening; and it was not till he had quitted Tabnae at noonday and turned his face towards Succoth, that the hope and joy of seeing Miriam again, and of delivering so cheering a message, had revived in Hosea's breast.

Never had his heart beat higher with glad anticipation than as he rode on through the night, each step bringing him nearer to his father and his beloved; and at his journey's end, instead of the highest bliss, nought had he found till now but the most cruel disappointment.

He had related his meeting with the lepers briefly and reluctantly, although he had done, as he believed, what was best for these hapless folk. Any one of his fellow soldiers would have had a word of praise for him; but she, whose approbation was dearer to him than all else, pointed, as he ended, to a certain spot in the camp, saying mournfully:

"They are of our blood; our God is their God.

The lepers of Zoan, Phakos and Phibeseth followed the rest at a reasonable distance, and their tents are pitched outside the camp. Those of Succoth likewise—they are not many—are to journey with them; and when the Lord promised the people the land for which they longed, it was to great and small and poor alike; and, of a surety to those poor wretches who now are left in the hand of the enemy. Would you not have done better to divide those of our race from the Egyptians and bring them hither?"

At this the soldier's manly pride rebelled, and his reply was grave and stern:

"In war a man learns to sacrifice hundreds that he may save thousands. Even the shepherd removes the rotten sheep to save the flock."

"Very true," replied the girl eagerly, "for the shepherd is but a man, who knows no remedy against the evil. But the Lord who hath called all His people will not suffer them to come to harm through obedience."

"So women think!" retorted Hosea, "but the counsels of compassion which move them must not be suffered to weigh too heavily in those of men. You are ready to follow the dictates of your heart, as indeed is most fitting, so long as you do not forget what beseems you and your sex."

Miriam's cheeks flushed crimson, for she felt the stab that was hidden in this speech with a double pang since it was dealt by Hosea. How much had she this day been forced to renounce for her sex's sake! And now she was to be made to feel that she was not his equal, that she was but a woman. In the presence of the heap of stones which Hur had built up, and on which her hand at this moment rested, he had appealed to her judgment as though she were one of the leaders of the people; and now he roughly set her in her place—her, who felt herself second to no man in gifts and in spirit.

But he too had been wounded in his pride, and her demeanour warned him that this hour would decide whether in their future union, he or she should get the mastery. He stood up in front of her in all his pride and high determination—never indeed had she thought him so manly or so desirable. Yet the instinct to fight for her injured womanly dignity was stronger than any other impulse, and finally it was she who broke the painful silence which had followed his words of reproof. With a degree of composure which she only achieved by the exertion of her utmost power of will, she began:

“But we are both forgetting what keeps us here at this hour of the night.—You were to reveal to

me what brought you hither, and to hear from my lips the judgment of the Lord—not that of Miriam—the foolish woman!”

“I had hoped to hear the voice of the maiden in whose love I trusted,” he gloomily replied.

“You shall hear it,” she said, taking her hand from off the heap of stones. “But it may befall that I cannot consent to the judgment of the man whose power and wisdom are so far greater than mine; and you have taught me that you cannot brook a woman’s contradiction—not even mine.”

“Miriam!” he exclaimed reproachfully, but she went on more vehemently:

“I have felt it deeply, and as it would be the greatest sorrow of my life to lose your heart, you must understand me fully before you call upon me to pronounce judgment.”

“But first hear my message.”

“No, No!” she eagerly replied. “The answer now would die on my lips. First let me tell you of the woman who, though she has a loving heart, knows something which she holds far above love. You smile? And you have a right to smile till you know that which I will reveal to you.”

"Speak then," he broke in, in a tone which betrayed how hard he felt it to keep patience.

"Thanks for that!" she said warmly. Then, leaning against the tree trunk, while he sat down on the bench and looked now into her face and now on the ground, she spoke:

"I have left childhood behind me, aye, and my youth will soon be a thing of the past. While I was still but a little child I was not very different from other girls, I played with them, and although my mother had taught me to pray to the God of our Fathers, still I was well content to hear what other children would tell me of Isis. As often as I could I would steal into her temple, buy spices, and strip my little garden for her; would pour oil on her altar and offer her flowers.—I was taller and stronger than many maidens of my age, and the daughter of Amram to boot, so that the others were ready enough to obey me and do all I proposed. When I was eight years old we moved hither from Zoan. Before I had found a playfellow here you came to stay in the house of Gamaliel, your sister's husband, to be healed of a wound from a Libyan's lance. Do you remember that time, when you, a young man, made a comrade of the little girl? I fetched you all you needed, I chattered to you of all I knew,

and you told me tales of bloody fights and victory, and described the splendid armour and the horses and chariots of the soldiers. You showed me the ring you had won by your valour, and when the wound in your breast was healed, we wandered about the meadows together.

“Isis, whom you worshipped, had her temple here also, and how often would I steal secretly into its courts, to pray for you and carry her my holiday cakes. I had heard so much from you of Pharaoh and his magnificence, of the Egyptians and their wisdom, skill and luxurious lives, that my little heart longed to dwell among them in the capital; it had moreover come to my ears that my brother Moses had been treated with great kindness in the King’s Palace, and had become a man held in high honour among the priesthood. I could no longer be content with my own folk who seemed to me in all respects far behind the Egyptians.

“Then came the parting from you; and as my little heart was piously inclined and looked for all good to come from Divine power, by whatever name it was called, I prayed for Pharaoh and for his army with which you were fighting.

“My mother would sometimes speak of the God

of our Fathers as of a mighty Defence who had done great things of old for his people, and she told me many fine tales of him; still, she herself often sacrificed in the temple of Set, or carried clover flowers to the sacred bull of the Sun-god. She had kind thoughts too of the Egyptians, among whom our Moses, her pride and joy, had risen to such high honour.

“Thus I came to be fifteen years old and lived happy with the rest. In the evening, when the herdsmen had come home I sat round the fire with the young ones, and it pleased me when the sons of the great owners preferred me above the others and paid court to me; but I rejected them all, even the Egyptian Captain who commanded the Guard in charge of the storehouse; for I always thought of you, the companion of my childhood. The best I had to give would not have seemed too much for a magic spell which might have brought you to my side, when at high festivals I danced and sang to the tambourine and the loudest praise was always for me. Whenever I sang before others I thought of you; and as I did so I poured out all that filled my heart as a lark might, so that my song was to you, and not to the praise of the Most High to whom it was dedicated.”

At this a fresh glow of passion possessed the man to whom his beloved confessed such gladdening truth. He sprang up and held out his arms to her; but she forbade him with stern severity, that she herself might remain mistress of the longing which threatened to be too much for her.

Her deep voice had a different ring in it as she went on, at first quickly and softly, but presently louder and more impressively:

"And so I came to be eighteen, and I could endure Succoth no longer. An unutterable yearning, not for you only, came over my soul. Things that had formerly brought me joy now seemed empty, and the monotony of my life here, in this remote frontier town, among flocks and herdsmen, seemed to me dreary and wretched.

"Eleazar, Aaron's son, had taught me to read, and brought me books full of tales which could never have been true, but which nevertheless stirred my heart. Many of them contained praises of the gods, and ardent songs such as lovers sing one to another. These took deep hold on me; and when I was alone in the evening or at midday, when all was still, and the shepherds and herdsmen were away at pasture, I would rehearse these songs, or

invent new, mostly hymns in praise of the Divinity; in honour sometimes of Amon, with his ram's head, or of Isis, with the head of a cow; but often too of the Almighty Lord who revealed himself to Abraham, and of whom my mother spoke more often as she grew older. And this was what I loved best—to think in silence of such songs of praise, and wait for visions in which I saw God's greatness and glory, or fair angels and hideous demons. From a merry child I had become a pensive maiden who let her life go as it might. There was no one to warn or to hinder me; my parents were now dead and I lived alone with my aunt Rachel, a misery to myself and no joy to any one else. Aaron, my eldest brother, had gone to dwell with his father-in-law Aminadab; for the old home of Amram, his inheritance, was too small for him, and he had bestowed it on me. My companions even avoided me, for all gladness had departed from me, and I looked down upon them in sinful scorn because I could compose songs and see more in my visions than ever they saw.

“Now I was nineteen, and on the eve of my birthday, which no one remembered save Milcah, Eleazar's daughter, the Lord for the first time gave me a message. He appeared in the form of an

angel and bid me set the house in order, for a guest was on the way whom I loved greatly.

"It was very early in the morning, and I sat under this tree; so I went into the house, and with old Rachel's help I set the house in order, and made ready a bed, and prepared a meal with wine, and all that we welcome a guest withal. But noon came, and the afternoon, and the evening became night, and the night morning again, and still I waited for the guest. However, as the sun was again getting low that day, the dogs began to bark loudly, and when I went forth to the gate a tall man came hurrying towards me. His hair was grey and in disorder, and he wore a priest's white robe all in tatters. The dogs shrank from him whining; but I knew him for my brother Moses.

"Our meeting again after such a long time brought me more fear than pleasure, for Moses was fleeing from his pursuers because he had slain the overseer. But this you know.

"Wrath still flashed from his sparkling eyes. He appeared to me to resemble the god Set, and each of his slow words was engraved on my mind as with a hammer and chisel. He remained three times seven days and nights under my roof, and since I

was alone with him and deaf Rachel—for he had to remain hidden—no one came between us, and he taught me to know Him who is the God of our fathers. I listened to his burning words with fear and trembling, and his weighty speech fell, as it seemed to me, like rocks upon my breast, when he impressed on me what the Lord God expected of me, or when he described the wrath and the greatness of Him whom no mind can comprehend, and whose Name none may utter. Yes, when he spoke of Him and of the Egyptian gods, it appeared as though the God of Israel stood forth like a giant whose brow touched the heavens, while the other gods all crouched at his feet in the dust like whimpering hounds.

“He also taught me that we alone, and no others, were the Lord’s chosen people. Now, for the first time, I was filled with pride that I was a scion of Abraham, and that every Hebrew was my brother and every daughter of Israel my sister. Now, too, I understood how cruelly those of my own kindred had been tortured and oppressed. I had hitherto been blind to the anguish of my people, but Moses opened my eyes, and sowed the seeds of hatred in my heart, a great hatred of the tyrants of my brethren; and from that hatred grew love for the bondsmen. I vowed that I would cling to my brother and wait

on the voice of the Lord,—and behold he did not tarry; the voice of Jehovah spoke to me as with tongues.

“About that time old Rachel died, and by Moses’ desire I did not live alone, but followed the bidding of Aaron and Aminadab and became a guest under their roof. Still, even then, I lived a life apart. Nor did they hinder me; and this sycomore in their field became, as it were, my own place.

“It was under its shade that God bid me call thee and name thee Holpen of Jehovah—and thou, Joshua, and no longer Hosea, hast done the bidding of the Lord thy God and of his prophetess!”

At this point the soldier interrupted the damsel’s tale, to which he had listened earnestly, though with growing disappointment:

“Yes,” he said, “I obeyed you and the Lord God!—what it cost me to do so you care not to enquire. You have told all your story down to the present hour, but you have nothing to say of the days you spent with us as our guest at Tanis after my mother’s death. Can you forget what your eyes first told me there, and then your lips? Has the day of our parting vanished from your memory, and the evening on the sea when you bid me set my

hopes on you and remember you? Did the hatred which Moses implanted in your heart exclude all else—even love?”

“Even love?” cried Miriam raising her tearful eyes to his face, “Oh no! How could I ever forget that time, the happiest of my life? But from the day when Moses came from the desert to redeem the people from bondage by the command of the Lord—it was three months after your departing—from that day I have lost all count of years and months, days and nights.”

“And you will forget this night?” asked Joshua bitterly.

“Nay, not so,” said Miriam, looking beseechingly in his face. “The love which grew up in the child’s heart, and did not fade in the girl’s, can never die—” Here she suddenly broke off, raised her hands and eyes to Heaven as if wrapt in ecstasy and cried aloud: “Thou art nigh to me, Great God Almighty, and canst read my heart! Thou knowest wherefore Miriam counts no more by days and years, and asks only to be Thy handmaid until thou hast granted to her people, who is this man’s people, that which Thou hast promised!”

While the maiden was uttering this prayer,

which came from the very bottom of her heart, a light breeze had sprung up, the herald of dawn, and the thick, leafy crown of the sycomore tree whispered above her head. Hosea devoured her tall majestic figure with his eyes as she stood half lighted and half shrouded in the doubtful gleam of dawn, for the things he saw and heard seemed to him as a miracle. The tidings of great joy to which she looked forward for her people, and which must be accomplished before she would allow herself to follow the desires of her heart, he believed himself to be the bearer of in the name of the Lord. Carried away by the high flight of her spirit, he hastened to her side, seized her hand, and cried with hopeful excitement:

“The hour has come when you may once more tell day from night, and hearken to the wishes of your heart. For I Joshua, no more Hosea, came at the word of the Lord, and the message I bear brings new happiness to the people whom I will learn to love as you love them, and, if it be the will of the Most High, the promise of a new and better land.”

Miriam's eyes flashed with gladness; carried away by thankful joy she cried:

“Are you then come to lead us to the land

Jehovah hath promised us? O Lord how great are thy mercies. He, he comes as thy messenger!"

"Yea, he comes, he is here!" cried Joshua rapturously; and she did not prevent him as he clasped her to his breast; with a thrill of joy she returned his ardent kiss.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIGHTENED at her own weakness, Miriam presently freed herself from her lover's arms, but she was ready to listen with eager gladness to his tale of a fresh mercy vouchsafed by the Most High, and his brief account of all he had done and felt since he had received her call.

First he described how terribly he had been divided in his mind; how, then, he had found entire faith, and in obedience to the God of his nation and to his father's appeal, had gone to the palace, facing the risk of imprisonment or death, to be released of his oath. Next he told her how graciously the mourning sovereigns had received him; and how, finally, he had taken upon himself the office of appealing to the chief of his people, and persuading him to lead the Hebrews only a short way into the desert, and then bring them home again to Egypt, where a new and splendid province should be granted them on the West of the Nile. Henceforth no Egyptian overseer should oppress them;

their own elders should be permitted to rule them, and a man of their own choosing should govern them.

To conclude, he observed that he himself was minded to become the captain of the Hebrew fighting-men, and also to mediate and smooth matters between them and the Egyptians whenever it might seem needful. Happily united to her in that new home, he would extend his care to the humblest of his brethren. On his way hither he had felt as though, after a furious fight, the blasts of the trumpets proclaimed victory. And, indeed, he had a right to believe himself a messenger and ambassador from the Lord. Here, however, he interrupted himself; for Miriam, who at first had listened to him with anxious ears and flashing eyes, had heard him, as he proceeded, with a more and more anxious and troubled mien. And when he spoke of his hope that they might together do much for their people, she drew away her hand, gazed with terror into his handsome face glowing with glad excitement, and then cast down her eyes as if striving for self-control.

Unsuspecting of what had moved her thus, he went closer to her. He deemed it was maidenly shyness that held her silent, at having yielded a first

favour to the man she loved. But when she shook her head disapprovingly at his last words, announcing his commission as God's messenger, he was almost beside himself with cruel disappointment, and exclaimed vehemently:

"Then do you believe that the Lord hath defended me, as by a miracle, against the wrath of the mighty, and given me grace to win for His people, from the hand of the great King, such boons as never before did the strong vouchsafe to the weak, only to trifle with the happy trustfulness of a man whom He Himself called to serve Him?"

At this she interrupted him in a woeful voice, with difficulty restraining her tears:—

"The strong to the weak! If this is your thought you force me to ask you in your own father's words, 'Who then is the mightier, the Lord our God, or that poor creature on the throne, whose first-born has perished at a sign from the Most High as grass is cut down and withered?' Oh, Hosea, Hosea!"

"Nay, Joshua;" he wildly exclaimed. "Do you refuse me the name which your God bestowed on me? I trusted in His aid when I entered the palace of the great king; I sought redemption and release for the nation under God's guidance, and I found them,—and you—you—"

“Moses and your father,—aye, and all the faithful leaders of Israel, seek no redemption at the hand of the Egyptians,” she replied with fluttering breath. “All that they can bestow must bring destruction on Israel; the grass that we have sown withers where the Egyptian treads! And you, whose honest soul they have but mocked at, you are the lure sent forth by the bird-catcher to entice the birds into the net. You are, as it were, the hammer in their hand, to rivet the fetters withal, more firmly than ever, which we, by God’s help, have broken. With the eyes of the spirit I see—”

“Enough! Too much!” replied the warrior, grinding his teeth with rage. “Hatred has clouded your clear soul. And if the bird-catcher—as you would have it—is of a truth using me as his lure, and mocked at me and led me astray, it was from you—yes, you—that he might have learnt it. Encouraged by you, I built on your love and faithfulness; of you I hoped every thing!—And that love! where is it? You have spared me nothing that could wound me, and I, likewise, will not spare myself but confess the whole truth. It was not alone because the God of my fathers bid me that I obeyed, but because it was through you and my father that the call came to me. You aspire after a land in

the far unknown, promised by the Lord; I open to my people the way to a certain and happy home. Nor was it for their sake—for what have my people ever done for me? But above all that I might dwell there with you whom I love, and with my old father. And you, whose cold heart knows not love, with my kiss on your lips you reject the boon I offer, out of hatred for the hand that bestows it on me. All your thoughts and deeds have become as those of a man, and all that other women prize most highly you spurn from you with your foot!”

At this Miriam could bear no more; she clasped her hands over her quivering face, sobbing bitterly.

By this time the sleeping tribes were awakening in the growing dawn; serving men and women came forth from the houses of Aminadab and Nahshon. All, as they woke to a new day, made their way to the well or the drinking-troughs, but she heeded them not.

How her heart had leaped and rejoiced when her lover had declared to her that he had come to lead them to the land which the Lord had promised to his people. She had rested so gladly on his bosom to know for a moment that highest bliss, but how soon had it been turned to cruel disappointment. While the morning breeze had rustled through the

thick foliage of the sycomore, and while Joshua was telling her of Pharaoh's promises to the people, it had seemed to her that the voice of God in His wrath was murmuring in the tree-tops, or that she heard once more the angry speech of old Nun. He had stormed at Uri like thunder and lightning,—and wherein did Joshua's proposals differ from Uri's?

The people, as she had heard from Moses himself, were lost if they failed in truth to their God and yielded to Pharaoh's enticements. To ally herself with a man who had come to undo all for which her brothers and his own father had lived and struggled, would be base treason. And yet she loved Joshua; and, instead of repulsing him harshly, how willingly, ah, how gladly, would she again have lain on the heart, which, as she knew, longed for her so ardently!

But the murmur in the boughs still went on; she could fancy it was echoing Aaron's words of warning, and she vowed to remain true, strong as the impulse was that drew her to her lover. The whispering in the tree was of a surety the Voice of God, who had chosen her to be His handmaid. When Joshua had declared in his passionate excitement that the desire to possess her was what had prompted him to action on behalf of the people,

who to him were as indifferent as to her they were dear, she had suddenly felt her heart stand still, and she could not forbear sobbing in her mental anguish.

Heedless of Joshua or the awakening multitude, she flung herself again at the foot of the sycomore with arms upraised to Heaven, staring wide-eyed at the boughs, as though expecting some fresh revelation. The morning air sighed among the leaves, and suddenly it seemed as though a bright radiance shone, not only in her soul, but all about her, as always happened when a vision was granted to her prophetic eye. And in the midst of the light, behold a figure, whose aspect terrified her while his name was whispered by every trembling leaf; and the name was not Joshua, but that of another whom her heart could not desire. He stood in the blaze of glory before her mind's eye, a tall, noble form, and with a solemn gesture laid his hand on the heap of stones he had made.

Breathless with suspense she gazed at the vision; and yet she would gladly have closed her eyes to avoid seeing it, and have shut her ears to the voice of the murmuring sycomore. Suddenly the glory was extinct, the figure had vanished, the voice of the leaves was hushed, she saw before her,

in a ruddier glow, the figure of the only man whose lips her own had ever kissed, sword in hand, rushing on an invisible foe at the head of his father's herdsman. The vision came and was gone as swiftly as a flash of lightning; and yet, even before it had vanished, she knew all it meant to her. This man, whom she had named Joshua, and who had every quality that could fit him to be the guardian and leader of his people, should not be led astray by love from the high task to which the Lord had called him. None among the Hebrews should hear the message he had brought and thereby be turned away from the perilous path on which they had entered. Her duty was now as clear in her sight as the vanished vision had been. And as though the Most High would fain show her that she had understood rightly what the vision demanded of her, before she had risen from her knees to announce to Joshua the sorrow to which she had condemned him and herself, she heard Hur's voice close at hand, bidding the crowd, which was gathering from all sides, to form in order for their march.

The way of salvation from herself lay before her.

Joshua, meanwhile, had not ventured to intrude on her devotions. He was wounded and

angered to the depths of his soul by her rejection. But gazing down on her he had seen her tall frame shiver as with a sudden chill, her eyes and hands uplifted as if spell-bound; and he had understood that something great and sacred was stirring in her soul which it would be a crime to disturb; nay, he had been unable to resist an instinctive feeling that he was a bold man who could desire a woman so closely one with God. It would be bliss indeed to be lord of this sublime creature, but at the same time hard to see her prefer another, though it were the Almighty, so far above her lover.

Men and beasts were already trooping in crowds past the sycamore, and when at length Joshua decided that he must speak to Miriam and remind her of the gathering throng, she rose, and turning to him, spoke these vehement words:

"I have spoken with the Lord, Joshua, and I now know His will. Dost thou remember the words with which God called thee?"

He bowed his head and she went on:

"It is well. Then learn now what it is that the Most High God said to thy father, and to Moses, and to me. He will lead us forth from the land of Egypt, far, far away, to a land where neither Pharaoh nor his rulers shall have dominion over us, and

He alone will be our King. This is His will; and if thou desire to serve Him thou shalt follow us, and, if we have need to fight, be Captain over the men of our people."

At this he beat his breast and cried in great trouble: "I am bound by an oath to return home to Tanis to tell Pharaoh how the leaders of the Hebrews have received the message which I have brought to them. Yea, and even if it should break my heart I cannot be forsworn."

"And rather shall mine break," Miriam moaned, "than I break my vow to the Lord. We have chosen. And here, in the presence of this heap of stones, all the ties are cut which ever bound us!"

At this he was beside himself; he eagerly strove to take her hand, but she repulsed him with an imperious gesture, turned away, and went forward towards the throng of people who were crowding round the well with the cattle and sheep.

Great and small respectfully made way for her as she walked with proud dignity towards Hur, who was giving orders to the shepherds. He came to meet her, and when he had heard the promise she made him in an undertone, he laid his hand on her head and said with grave solemnity: "May the Lord bless our union."

Then, hand in hand with the grey-haired man to whom she had plighted her troth, Miriam turned to meet Joshua, and nothing betrayed the deep agitation of her soul but the fluttering rise and fall of her bosom, though her cheeks were indeed pale; her eyes were dry, and her demeanour as unbending as ever.

She left it to Hur to tell the lover whom she had rejected now and for ever, what she had done; and when the warrior heard it he started back as though a gulf had yawned at his feet.

His lips were bloodless as he gazed at the unequally matched pair. Scornful laughter seemed to him the only fit answer for such an announcement; but Miriam's earnest face helped him to suppress it, and to conceal his painful agitation under some trivial speech. However, he felt that he could not for long preserve the semblance of equanimity, so he bid Miriam farewell. He must, as he hastily explained, greet his father and request him to call a meeting of the Elders.

But before he had done speaking, the quarrelling herdsmen came crowding round Hur that he might decide what place in the procession it behoved each tribe to take; so he went with them; and as soon as Miriam found herself alone with the soldier,

she said beseechingly, but in a low voice and with imploring eyes:

“A hasty deed has broken the bonds that united us; but a higher tie still holds us together. As I have given up that which my heart held dearest, to be faithful to my God and my people, so do thou sacrifice that to which thy soul clings. Obey the Most High, who hath named thee Joshua! This hour hath changed our gladness into bitter grief; may the good of the people be its fruit! Remain a true son of the race which gave thee thy father and mother, and be what the Lord hath called thee to be, a captain of his people.

“If thou abide by the oath thou hast sworn to Pharaoh, and reveal to the Elders the promises thou hast brought, they will go over to thy side, that I know full well. Few will stand up against thee, but foremost of those few will be thine own father. I can hear him uplift his voice in anger against his own beloved son, and if thou shut thine ear even to his admonition, then the people will follow thee instead of following the Lord and thou wilt lead the Israelites, as a mighty man of valour. But then when the day comes in which the Egyptian lets his promises fly to the four winds thou wilt see thy people more cruelly oppressed than even heretofore,

and when they turn aside from the God of their fathers to worship the gods with the heads of beasts, the curse of thy father shall fall upon thee. The wrath of the Most High shall be visited upon the froward, and despair shall be the lot of him who shall lead the foolish folk astray after that the Lord hath chosen him to be the captain of His people. I, a weak woman, the handmaid of the Lord and the damsel who loved thee better than life, I cry unto thee: Beware of the curse of thy father and the hand of the Lord! Beware lest thou lead the people into sin!"

A slave girl here came out to Miriam to bid her go to the old people, so she only added in a low voice: "One word more. If thou would'st prove thyself not less weak than the woman whose opposition moved thee to anger, renounce thine own will for the sake of the multitude of thy brethren. Lay thine hand on this heap and swear to me—"

But the prophetess's voice failed her. Her hands felt about vainly for some support, and with a cry she fell on her knees close to Hur's heap of stones. Joshua hastened to raise her, holding her in his strong arm, and at his call some women hurried up and soon revived the fainting girl.

As she opened her eyes they wandered vaguely

from one to another, and it was not till her gaze fell on Joshua's anxious face that she fully understood where she was and what had happened. Then she hastily drank a deep draught of the water which a shepherd woman offered her, dried her eyes which were streaming with tears, sighed bitterly, and with a wan smile said to Joshua:

"I am after all but a weak woman."

Then she went towards the house, but after walking a few steps she turned round, signed to Joshua and said:

"You see they are forming in ranks. They are about to set forth. Are you still of the same mind? There is yet time to call the Elders together."

But he shook his head in denial, and as he met her eye, glistening with gratitude, he softly replied: "I will ever bear in mind this heap and this hour, wife of Hur! Greet my father from me and tell him that I love him. Tell him too the name which his son is henceforth to bear by the command of the Most High. In that name which promised me the help of the Lord, he shall put his trust when he hears whither I go, to keep the oath I have sworn."

He waved his hand to Miriam and turned to go

to the camp, where his horse had been fed and watered; but she called after him:

"One last word. Moses left a letter for you in the hollow of the tree."

At this the warrior went to the sycomore and read the message which the man of God had left for him.

"Be steadfast and strong," was the brief injunction, and Joshua raised his head and cried joyfully, "The words are a comfort to my soul; and if it is for the last time that we have met, Wife of Hur, if I now go to my death, be sure that I shall know how to be steadfast and strong, even unto the end. And do you do all you can for my old father."

Herewith he sprang on horseback, and as he made his way to Tanis, faithful to his oath, his soul was free from fears, although he did not conceal from himself that he was riding forth to great peril. His highest hopes were destroyed, and yet glad excitement struggled with his grief in his soul. A new and glorious emotion had its birth there, filling his whole being, and it was scarcely damped, though he had suffered a wound cruel enough to darken the light of day to any other man. He had now a fixed aim in life, and besides this he had the assur-

ance that he might hold himself as worthy as Hur or as any other man. None could depose him from this high place but the glorious twain to whom he would dedicate his blood and his life: his God and his people.

He was amazed to discern how greatly this new enthusiasm cast into the shade everything else that stirred in his breast. Now and again, indeed, he bowed his head in sorrow as he remembered his old father; still, he had done right in setting aside his longing to press him once more to his heart. The old man would scarcely have understood his motives, and it was better for them to separate without meeting, rather than in open dissension.

Sometimes it seemed to him as though all that had happened could be but a dream; and as he was still intoxicated, as it were, by the agitations of the last few hours, his stalwart frame was but little conscious of the fatigues he had gone through. At a well-known inn on the road, where he found several warriors, and among them certain Captains of his acquaintance, he at length allowed himself and his horse to rest and eat, and as he rode on refreshed, daily life asserted its rights; he passed various companies of soldiers on their way to the city of Tanis, and was informed that they were under

orders to join themselves there to the troops which he himself had brought home from Libya.

At last he rode into the town, and as he went past the temple of Amon he heard loud wailing, though he had learned on his way that the pestilence was well nigh at an end. From many signs he gathered the fact which was presently announced to him by some guards; the god's high-priest and first prophet, Ruie, had just died in the ninetieth year of his age, and Baie, the second prophet, who had so warmly assured him of his friendship and gratitude, and who counted on his co-operation in a dangerous enterprise, was his successor—High-priest and Judge, Seal-bearer and Treasurer, in short the most powerful man in the kingdom.

CHAPTER XVII. ‘

“HE whom Jehovah helps!” murmured a chain-laden prisoner with a bitter smile, as, five days later, he, with forty fellow-sufferers, was led through the triumphal arch of Tanis towards the East.

Their destination was the mines on the peninsula of Sinai, where fresh forced labourers were needed.

The smile on the victim’s face soon vanished; then he drew up his muscular form while his bearded lips muttered the words: “Steadfast and strong;” and he whispered to the youth who was walking at his side, as though he wished to convey to him some of the strength that he had recovered; “Courage, Ephraim, courage; look up and not in the dust, come what may!”

“Silence whilst marching!” cried one of the armed Libyan guards who escorted the gang, to the elder prisoner, and he raised his whip with a menacing gesture. Joshua was the man he threat-

ened, and his companion was Ephraim, who had been condemned to share his fate.

Every Egyptian child knew what this meant, for "Send me to the mines!" was this people's most dreadful imprecation, and no prisoner's lot was half so hard as that of the condemned state criminal.

A series of frightful humiliations and hardships awaited them at the mines. The strength of the healthiest was ruined by unheard-of over-work, and the exhausted victims were forced to do things so far beyond their power that they soon sank into the everlasting rest for which their martyred souls had long pined. To be sent to the mines was equivalent to a slow and agonising death; and yet life is so dear to man, that it was regarded as a milder punishment to be dragged off to forced labour in the mountains than to be handed over to the Executioner.

Joshua's encouraging words had little effect on Ephraim; but when, a few minutes later, a chariot shaded by an umbrella drove past the gang, and in it, behind the charioteer and a matron, stood an elegant young woman, he turned round quickly and gazed after the vehicle with sparkling eyes, until the dust on the road hid it from sight.

The lady was thickly veiled, yet the youth thought that he had recognised her for whose sake he had rushed into peril, and whose lightest sign he would even now fly to obey. And Ephraim had guessed correctly, for the lady in the chariot was Kasana, the daughter of the Captain of the Archers; the elder woman was her nurse.

On reaching a little temple on the road, near a thicket of acacia, amongst which stood a well for the use of travellers, after the chariot had left the prisoners at some distance behind, Kasana begged the matron to wait. Then, springing out lightly on the road, she walked to and fro with a bowed head, under the shadow of the trees, until she knew by a rolling cloud of dust that the criminals were approaching.

Then, taking out of her garment some gold rings which she had brought with her for the purpose, she went up to the driver of the melancholy procession as he drew near on an ass, and whilst she talked to him and pointed to Joshua, the guard cast a stolen glance at the rings which had been slipped into his hand. His modesty had only allowed him to expect silver, and his face at once assumed a friendly and courteous expression at the sight of their pleasing yellow glitter.

His countenance certainly darkened again at the demand Kasana made, but it brightened once more at a promise of further largesse from the young widow. "Take the moles to the well, men! Let them drink! They shall go fresh and healthy under ground!"

Then he rode up to the prisoners and called to Joshua:—"You, who have yourself once ruled over many people, still seem to me more stiffnecked than is good for you or me. You, guards, look after the others. I will watch this one, I have a few words to say to him."

Then he clapped his hands as if he were driving poultry from a garden, and whilst the prisoners drew water in the buckets of the well, and, with their guards, rejoiced in the refreshing drink, the leader led Joshua and Ephraim on one side, for they could not be separated by reason of the chains that bound them together by the ancles. They were soon hidden from the others behind the little temple, and then the driver sank down on a bench at a little distance, having first with a significant gesture shown the two Hebrews the bludgeon in his right hand, and pointed to the dogs who were rubbing against his feet.

He kept his eyes open too during the con-

versation that followed. They might say what they pleased; he knew his duty; and though he understood how to shut one eye on a parting, in return for good gold, for quite twenty years, in spite of many attempts to escape amongst his moles—as he called those condemned to the mines—not one had ever succeeded in getting away.

The lovely woman was perhaps this fine fellow's betrothed, for he had been told that Joshua had been a commander. But he had already called many noble birds his "moles," and if this veiled woman should contrive to slip files or gold into the prisoners' hands, so much the better; this evening nothing on these two should be left unsearched, not even the youth's black hair, which had been left unshorn in the confusion that had taken place at the start of the prisoners, for they had been sent off just before the departure of Pharaoh's army.

The subject of the woman's whispered negotiations with the fallen captain remained unknown to the driver, but from her sorrowful face and manner he inferred that she had caused the ruin of this noble man,—Oh! woman, woman!—and that lad in chains! the glances he cast at the slender creature were so ardent that she had to draw her veil closer.

But patience! Great Father Amon! His moles were going to a good school for modesty.

Now the woman removed her veil. She was beautiful! It must be hard to part with such a lovely creature—and now she cried so bitterly.

The rough guard's heart was touched as much as his position would allow, and he could willingly have struck the elder prisoner with his whip, for was it not an outrage, having such a lover, to stand like stone. At first the wretch did not even stretch out a hand to the woman who certainly loved him; whilst he, the guard, would have been glad to see the two kiss and embrace.

Or was this beauty perhaps the warrior's wife, who had deceived him? But no, no, how kindly he approached her now! A father speaks like that to his child, but his mole was much too young to have so old a daughter. A riddle! However he did not care about the answer, since it was in his power during the march to make the most taciturn convict as frank as an open book.

And not alone the simple driver of the gang, but any one might have wondered why this beautiful woman had come out into the highway at early dawn to see an unfortunate man weighed down with

chains. Nothing but tormenting anxiety for the man she loved could have impelled Kasana to take this journey and expose herself to scorn as a woman of no reputation. A terrible fate awaited him; her lively imagination had pictured Joshua in the mines, languishing, broken down, pining away and at last dying with a curse on her upon his lips.

On the evening of the day on which Ephraim, shivering with high fever and half choked with dust, was carried into their house, her father informed her that in the person of the young Hebrew she held a hostage which would force Hosea to return to Tanis, and yield to the wishes of the prophet Baie, with whom she knew her father to be allied in a secret plot. He likewise confided to her that not only were great distinctions and high honours to be offered to Hosea, but also marriage with herself, to secure his fidelity to Egypt and to a cause from which he, Hornecht, looked for great benefits to the country and to his own kindred. This had filled her with high hopes of attaining long-wished-for joys, and as they sat near the little road-side temple she now confessed this to the prisoner with a drooping head and low sobs; for he was now for ever lost to her, and even if he could not return the love she had felt for him since her childhood,

he at any rate would not hate her and condemn her unheard.

Joshua, indeed, listened to her willingly, and assured her that nothing would gladden his heart more than that she should clear herself from the reproach of being answerable for the terrible fate awaiting himself and the youth by his side.

At this she sobbed aloud, and had to struggle to compose herself before she could succeed in telling her story with any degree of calmness.

Shortly after Hosea's departure the high priest had died, and Baie, the second prophet of Amon, had succeeded him. Things were then greatly altered; this man, the most powerful in the land, stirred up Pharaoh to hatred against the Hebrews and their leader Moses, whom till then the King and Queen had protected and feared. He had also persuaded the King to pursue the fugitive Hebrews, and the Army was at once ordered to go forth and compel them to return. She immediately feared that Hosea would certainly refuse to fight against those who were of his own blood, and that it must anger him to be sent forth to sign a contract which the Egyptians would begin to break before they could know whether it had been accepted.

Then, when he had returned home, he himself knew, only too well, how Pharaoh had treated him like a prisoner, and had refused to admit him to his presence until he had sworn to continue to lead the Egyptian troops, and to remain a faithful servant to the King. Still, Baie, the High Priest, had not forgotten that he had saved his life, and was well disposed towards him and grateful; and she knew that he had hoped to entangle Hosea in the secret conspiracy in which her father also was implicated. It was Baie, too, who had caused Pharaoh to release him from fighting against his own nation, on condition of his renewing his oath of fidelity; to place him in command of the foreign mercenaries; and to raise him to the high rank of "Friend of the King,"—but of course he must know all this already, for the new High Priest had with his own hand set the tempting prospect before Hosea, who had rejected it with such firm and manly decision. Her father had, in the first instance, been on his side, and, for the first time had entirely refrained from speaking with reproach of his Hebrew origin.

On the third day after Hosea's return, the captain of the Archers had gone out to speak with him, and since then everything had gone wrong. He therefore must know what it was that had turned

the man of whom she dared think no evil, since she was his daughter, from being a friend into a mortal enemy. She looked enquiringly into Hosea's face, and he was ready with his answer. The Captain had told him that he would be a welcome son-in-law.

"And you?" asked Kasana, looking anxiously at the speaker.

"I," replied the prisoner, "could only say that you had from your childhood been kind and dear to me, but that nevertheless there was much to forbid my linking the fate of any woman to mine."

At this Kasana's eyes flashed, and she cried:—"It is because you love another—a woman of your own people—the woman who sent Ephraim to you!"

But Joshua shook his head and answered gently:—"You are in error, Kasana. The woman of whom you speak is at this day another man's wife."

"But then," cried the widow, with revived spirit, as she looked at him with tender entreaty, "Why—oh! forgive me—why did you repulse him so harshly?"

"That was far from my purpose, dear child," he replied warmly, laying his hand on her head. "I

always have thought of you with all the affection of which I am capable. And though I could not, indeed, accede to his wish, it was because the sternest necessity forbids me ever to look forward to that peace and joy by my own hearth which other men may strive for. If I had been a free^d man, my life would have been one of constant journeying and warfare."

"But how many men," Kasana put in, "wield the sword and shield indeed, but rejoice at their home-coming to their wives, and the joys they find under their own roof."

"Very true," said he sadly. "But the duties that call me are such as the Egyptians know not of. I am the son of my Nation."

"And you purpose to serve it?" said Kasana. "Oh! I quite understand you. But then—why did you return to Tanis? Why did you trust yourself in Pharaoh's power?"

"Because I was pledged by a sacred oath, my child," said he kindly.

"An oath!" she exclaimed. "A promise which puts death and captivity between you and her whom you love, and those whom you desire to serve! Oh! would that you had never come back to this land of

unrighteousness, of treachery and ingratitude. That oath will plunge many into grief and weeping.—But what does a man care for the woe he brings on others? You have spoilt all my joy in life, hapless creature that I am; and at home, among your own people, you have a worthy father whose only son you are. How often have I seen the noble old man with his snow-white hair and flashing eye! And you will be like him if you attain to old age, as I used to think when I met him by the harbour, or in the fore-court of the High Gate, when he was ordering his hinds to bring in his tribute of beasts or woolly sheep to the receipt of custom. And now his latter days are to be darkened by his son's perversity."

"And now," corrected Joshua, "his son is going into misery, loaded with fetters; still he may hold his head high above those who have betrayed him. They, and Pharaoh at their head, have forgotten that I have shed my heart's blood for them on many a battle-field, and been faithful to the King through every kind of danger. Menephtah has abandoned me, and with him his chief minister, whose life I saved, and many another who once called me friend; they have deserted me and cast me out, and this innocent lad with me. But I tell you, woman,

those who have done this, those who have committed this sin—one and all, shall—”

“Curse them not!” cried Kasana, and her cheeks flushed scarlet.

But Joshua did not heed her prayer, but exclaimed, “Should I be a man if I did not thirst for vengeance?”

The young woman clung in terror to his arm and beseechingly went on:—

“How indeed can you forgive him? Only do not curse my father, for it was out of love for me that he became your enemy. You know him well, and his hot blood which easily carries him to extremes in spite of his years. He kept silence, even to me, of what he took as an insult—for he has seen me courted by many suitors and I am precious above all else in his eyes. Sooner will Pharaoh forgive the rebel than my father will pardon the man who scorns me, his dearest treasure. He came home frantic with rage. Every word he spoke was abuse. Then he could not bear to remain indoors, and he stormed outside as he had stormed within. At last, however, he would have allowed himself to be pacified, as he often had done before, if he had not met some one in the palace courts who made it

his business to pour oil on the flames. I heard all this from the High-priest's wife, for she too was greatly troubled to think that she had brought evil upon you, and her husband had already done everything in his power to save you. She, who is as brave as a man, was ready to second him, and to open the door of your prison; she has not forgotten that you saved her husband's life in Libya. Ephraim's chains were to be struck off at the same time as yours, and all was ready to enable you to escape."

"I know," replied Hosea gloomily. "And I would return thanks to the God of my fathers if they spoke falsely, who told me that it was your doing, Kasana, that our dungeon was locked on us more closely than ever."

At this the pretty, heart-broken young creature exclaimed vehemently: "And should I be here if that were true? Hatred indeed seethed in my soul, as in that of every woman whose love is scorned; but the ill fortune which befell you quickly changed my wrath into pity, and revived the fires in my heart. As truly as I pray to be mercifully judged after my death, I am innocent of this thing, and never ceased to hope for your release. It was not till last evening, when it was too late, that I learnt that Baie's attempt had failed. The High Priest can

do much, but the very man whom he will not thwart is closely allied with my father."

"You mean Pharaoh's nephew, prince Siptah," interrupted Joshua in great excitement. "They hinted to me the plots they were weaving about him. They wanted to set me in the place of Aarsu, the Syrian Captain, if I would but consent to let them work their will with my people and renounce my own flesh and blood. But rather would I have died twenty deaths than stain myself with such treason. Aarsu is far more fit for such dark schemes, though at last he will betray them all.—So far as I am concerned, the prince has good reason to hate me."

At this Kasana put her hand over her mouth, pointing uneasily to Ephraim and the gaoler, and whispered:—"Spare my father! The prince—whatever it was that roused his enmity—"

"The profligate is seeking to tempt you too into his net and he has been told that you are in love with me," the warrior broke in. But she only blushed, and bending her head in assent went on:—

"And for that reason Aarsu, whom he has taken into the conspiracy, is required to keep such close ward over you and Ephraim."

"The Syrian's eyes are wide open," cried Hosea. "But now, enough of this. I believe you, and thank you heartily for coming to us hapless wretches. How often have I thought with affection, even on the field, of the sweet maid whose blossoming I had watched!"

"And you will always think of poor Kasana without wrath or hatred?"

"Gladly; most gladly."

The young widow grasped the captive's hand with passionate agitation, and was about to press it to her lips, but he drew it away; and she said anxiously, gazing up at him with tearful eyes;—"Do you refuse me the favour which no benefactor refuses to a beggar?" Then she suddenly started up, and exclaimed so loudly that the gaoler was roused and looked to see where the sun was: "But I tell you, the time will come when you will offer me that hand to kiss. For when the messenger shall come from Tanis to bring you and this lad the freedom you pine for, it will be to Kasana that you will owe it!"

The fair face glowed with the flush of eager anticipation; and Joshua, seizing her hand, exclaimed:—"Oh, if only you might succeed in doing

what your faithful soul desires! How can I bear to prevent your trying to alleviate the terrible misfortune which fell upon this boy under your roof? Still, as an honest man, I must tell you that I can never more take service with the Egyptians; come what may, I shall henceforth for ever belong, body and soul, to those whom you persecute and despise, the nation and tribe into which my mother bore me."

At this her lovely head drooped; but she raised it again immediately to say:—"There is no one so high-souled and honest as you, no one that I have ever known from my childhood up! And when, among my own people, I fail to find any man whom I may reverence, I will remember you, in whom everything is great, and true, and without spot. And if poor Kasana may succeed in setting you free, do not despise her if you find her fallen away from the virtue in which you left her; for the humiliation she may have to endure, the shame she may be brought to—"

Hosea anxiously interrupted her:—

"What are you about to do?" he cried; but he was not to hear the answer, for the leader of the gang rose and clapped his hands, crying out:—"Now, on again, you moles, on again at once."

At this the warrior's heart was moved to deep regret; obedient to a hasty impulse he kissed the hapless Kasana on her fair brow and hair, and whispered:—"Leave me to pine if our freedom is to cost you such degradation. We shall never, indeed, meet again; for, come what may, my life henceforth will be nothing but a struggle and self-sacrifice. The night will close in on us darker and darker, but, however black it may be, one star will often shine on me and on this lad. The remembrance of you, sweet child, my loving and faithful Kasana." He pointed to Ephraim, and the youth pressed his lips, as if beside himself, to the hand and arm of Kasana who was sobbing aloud.

"Come on!" cried the driver once more, and with a grateful grin for a fresh gift of money, he helped the open-handed lady into her chariot.

The horses started, fresh shouts were heard, the whip cracked here and there on bare shoulders, a few wails of anguish rose through the morning air, and the file of prisoners went off towards the East. The chains on the victims' feet stirred up the dust which shrouded the wanderers, as grief and hatred and dread clouded each separate soul smong them.

On they went, bent in gloomy brooding; only

Hosea held his head erect. It was a comfort to him to know that Kasana, the sweet creature he had loved as a child, was innocent of his fate; and when his spirit sank within him he could revive it by repeating to himself the words of Moses:—"Steadfast and Strong."

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